Chronic pain in one page

What it is

What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is pain that carries on past the usual healing time, generally more than 3 to 6 months. It is common and it is real. Over time it often wears down sleep, mood and work, so care usually involves more than one person.

- Chronic pain lasts past the usual healing time
- It often breaks up sleep and lowers mood
- It is common in Australians over 45

The signs

What are the symptoms of chronic pain?

The main symptom is pain that keeps going for months, past the time an injury or illness should have healed. Around it often come broken sleep, low mood, worry, and trouble working or doing things you enjoy. A GP can assess all of it.

- The main sign is pain that outlasts healing
- Broken sleep and low mood often come with it
- Work and time with friends can get harder

How a diagnosis happens

How do the two plans work together?

They are two separate plans with their own rules. A mental health treatment plan helps with depression and gives Medicare rebates for 10 individual and 10 group sessions each calendar year. A GP chronic condition management plan covers long-term health conditions and allied health visits, up to five a year. Ask your GP how to use both.

- Two plans, each with its own rules
- Mental health plan: 10 individual sessions
- Chronic condition plan: allied health visits

Treatment

What is CBT-I, and who gives it?

CBT-I is cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia, the first treatment Australian GP guidance names for long-term insomnia. It changes the habits and thoughts that keep poor sleep going. Trained GPs, psychologists, nurses and other allied health workers can deliver it. You can also do it through self-guided online programs, including a free one called This Way Up.

- CBT-I is the first treatment for insomnia
- It works on sleep habits and thoughts
- GPs, psychologists and nurses can give it

Medication

Why do strong pain medicines need a PBS authority?

Two separate permissions, both your prescriber's to get. The PBS authority decides whether the script is subsidised. In most states, a state approval or permit decides whether your doctor may keep prescribing long term.

What it costs

What does it cost under Medicare?

It depends on your plans and your providers' fees. A GP chronic condition management plan is needed for up to 5 Medicare-rebated allied health visits. A Mental Health Treatment Plan gives up to 10 individual sessions a calendar year. Most major public hospitals run pain clinics. Ask each provider what your gap will be.

- A GP plan is needed for some allied health
- A mental health plan adds sessions
- Public pain clinics exist in big hospitals

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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