

## **CHRONIC PAIN HANDOUT**

### **ACUTE PAIN versus CHRONIC PAIN:**

“**Acute pain**” means the pain is new and is of short duration. It serves as a warning of injury to your body. Acute pain might be caused by many events, such as a surgery, a broken bone, a strained muscle, or a cut.

“**Chronic pain**” means pain that has lasted for a long time, longer than 3 months. It persists even though the initial injury has healed. There are many causes for chronic pain and some of them are very complicated. With chronic pain, it is important to remember that ‘hurt’ does not necessarily mean ‘harm’.

### **THE BEST WAYS TO IMPROVE CHRONIC PAIN:**

#### **WEIGHT LOSS:**

If you are overweight, losing weight is one of the best ways to improve chronic pain. Every pound you lose is one less pound of weight on a hurting muscle or joint. Losing weight involves eating healthily and exercise, both of which help to reduce pain.

#### **EXERCISE, GET ACTIVE!:**

People with chronic pain tend to avoid activity because they are afraid of the pain and afraid of doing even more damage. However, in chronic pain, just because something hurts does not mean it is causing more harm. In fact, staying active is one of the best ways to improve your pain in the long run.

So get out and exercise. Go for walks. Play sports. Ride a bike. Do any activity you enjoy. After a while, your pain won't hurt so much.

Even if you do not feel able to do 30 minutes of exercise per day, try starting with even 5-10 minutes per day, and gradually increase from there!

#### **EAT HEALTHILY:**

If you want to feel good physically and mentally, you need to have a healthy diet. Plus, healthy eating is essential to losing weight. If you would like to learn more about healthy eating, ask about seeing our dietitian.

#### **BE SOCIAL:**

People with chronic pain tend to avoid the fun activities they used to do. To improve chronic pain, it is crucial to spend time with your family and friends, doing things you enjoy!

#### QUIT SMOKING:

Smoking causes people to feel more pain for a number of reasons. If you smoke, but want to improve your pain, you *must* quit smoking.

#### AVOID ALCOHOL & DRUGS:

Just like smoking, if you want to improve your pain, you should avoid alcohol and street drugs.

#### SLEEP HYGIENE:

Poor sleep can worsen people's chronic pain. If you have trouble sleeping, ask for Dr. Stewart's handout on sleep advice.

### **WHAT ABOUT MEDICATIONS?:**

Sometimes medications can help in improving chronic pain. **However, medications alone are *not* the answer to treating chronic pain. You *must* also follow the advice given above.**

Medications that can help:

#### Anti-Inflammatory Medications:

- Examples include "Ibuprofen", "Advil," "Motrin," "Naproxen," "Aleve," "Celebrex," "Arthrotec," and "Meloxicam." You should only take one type of anti-inflammatory in the same day.
- You should avoid anti-inflammatory medications if you have kidney problems, bleeding from your stomach or bowels, or if you are taking certain blood pressure medications.

#### Acetaminophen:

- Also known as "Tylenol."
- Acetaminophen is ***different*** from anti-inflammatory medications and may be taken ***in addition to*** anti-inflammatories.
- You may take 2 Extra Strength (500mg) every 6 hours, as needed. (Do not take more than 8 Extra Strength pills per day).
- Caution with acetaminophen if you have liver problems.

#### Other Medications:

- Several other medications may be useful for chronic pain, such as Cymbalta, Lyrica, gabapentin, amitriptyline, or nortriptyline.

*Notice that strong pain medications (i.e. opioids like morphine or even Tylenol #3s) are NOT included above. Many studies have shown that opioids are NOT effective in the long term treatment of chronic non-cancer pain.*