

# Chronic pain

## Chronic pain

Chronic pain is defined as pain that persists or recurs for more than 3 months. In chronic pain syndromes, pain can be the sole or a leading complaint and requires special treatment and care. This could be 'chronic primary pain', which may be conceived of as a disease in its own right, for example in conditions such as fibromyalgia or non-specific low-back pain. In six other subgroups, pain is secondary to an underlying disease: chronic cancer-related pain, chronic neuropathic pain, chronic secondary visceral pain, chronic post-traumatic and postsurgical pain, chronic secondary headache and orofacial pain and chronic secondary musculoskeletal pain. These conditions are summarised as 'chronic secondary pain', in which pain may at least initially be conceived as a symptom. In surgical practice, patients with chronic pain may present for treatment of the cause (e.g. pancreatitis, malignancy) or concomitant benign pathology. Almost 50 years ago, using gate theory, Melzack and Wall proposed pain to be not only subjective but also a multidimensional experience that incorporates sensory/discriminative, motivational/affective and cognitive aspects. Recent guidance from the International Association for the Study of Pain highlights that the multidimensional aspect is one of the key components, hence the treatment of chronic pain involves a multidisciplinary multimodal approach. Mechanistically, chronic pain may be classified into: <sup>1</sup> Nociceptive pain, which may result from musculoskeletal disorders or cancer activating cutaneous nociceptors (pain receptors). Prolonged ischaemic or inflammatory processes result in sensitisation of peripheral nociceptor and altered activity in the central nervous system, leading to exaggerated responses in the dorsal horn of the spinal cord. The widened area of hyperalgesia and increased sensitivity (allodynia) have been attributed to increased transmission in the central nervous system. the peripheral or central nerves (excluding the 'physiological' pain due to noxious stimulation of the nerve terminals). It is classically of a 'burning', 'shooting' or 'stabbing' type and may be associated with allodynia, numbness and diminished thermal sensation. It is poorly responsive to opioids. Examples include trigeminal neuralgia, postherpetic neuropathy and diabetic neuropathy. - Chronic pain

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