



Developing a Plan for Self-Management of Pain



Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers

Introduction | Research shows that people can use problem solving and a combination of ways to manage pain on their own. With pain self-management, well-being and quality of life improve.¹ Self-management starts with setting goals, developing an action plan, and learning new behaviors to improve how you feel.

Begin by Setting Goals

Start your self-management plan by setting specific and realistic goals. Goals will help you develop action steps and motivate you to act. For example, you may want to become stronger, feel happier and more connected with others, reduce pain flare-ups, or feel calmer.

- Set goals in different areas of your life:
 - **Physical:** Fitness, leisure, pacing yourself, and rest
 - **Emotional:** Positive thoughts, spirituality, hobbies, and creative outlets
 - **Social:** Relationships and social activities
- Set **SMART** goals:



Develop an Action Plan

Next, develop an action plan by writing down the steps you'll take to reach your goals. Your plan may include pacing yourself or avoiding activities that make the pain worse. Or you might go to bed and get up at a set time, increase your awareness of negative thoughts, or do low-impact physical activities.

Here are some examples of action steps you might write in your action plan:

- *I will walk for 15 minutes before dinner, three times a week.*
- *I will follow an online stretching video on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday.*
- *I will stand for no more than 15 minutes at a time, then take a 5-minute rest break.*
- *I will join a book club this month to meet new people.*
- *I will start a journal. Before I go to bed, I will list two good things that happened each day.*
- *I will spend time with or talk on the phone with friends or family at least one time a week.*

It may take 6 weeks or longer to see improvement. Try a new activity or behavior long enough to give it time to work. If there is no improvement, don't give up. Adjust your approach or try something else. Keep in mind that goals may change over time. You may need to adapt your goals to fit changes in your pain level and your physical ability.

Goal Setting and Pacing Resources

To learn about more about goal setting and how to pace yourself, and for worksheets to help you set goals and write your action plan, these resources can help:

- **[Chronic Pain Self-Management—Pacing and Goal Setting \(West Suffolk National Health System\)](#)**: This eight-page resource describes why pacing yourself is important and how to do it. Includes a worksheet to help you set goals (page 7) and a worksheet to track your pacing plan (page 8).
- **[Managing Chronic Pain: Reclaiming Your Life \(Intermountain Healthcare\)](#)**: This 43-page booklet contains tools, information, and strategies for managing chronic pain. Includes a worksheet to help you write your goals (see page 38).

Self-Management Programs

To learn more and to have the support of other people who have chronic pain, consider signing up for a chronic pain self-management program. Self-management programs help people learn ways to practice self-care and to live healthier lives. Experts with clinical experience treating arthritis developed these programs. Research shows that people who take part in self-management programs have less pain, rely on others less, and have improved mental health compared with people who don't participate in such programs.^{2,3,4,5} They also are more involved in everyday activities and are more satisfied with life.

Self-management programs are often taught in small-group workshops. These workshops are offered in places like libraries or online. Some programs may have a fee.



Resources on Programs for Self-Management of Pain

[Self-Management for Chronic Pain \(The Alberta Ambassador Guideline Program video\)](#) | In this 17-minute video, people share their stories about what they do to manage their chronic pain.

[Self-Management Resource Center \(SMRC\)](#)

[SMRC Chronic Pain Self-Management Program](#) | This web page describes the Chronic Pain Self-Management Program and the research supporting its effectiveness.

[Evidence-Based Leadership Council \(EBLC\) Map of Programs](#) | This search engine will help you find programs in your area for self-management of chronic pain.

[Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Self-Management Education: Learn More. Feel Better.](#) | This web page by the CDC describes programs for pain self-management.

[Living a Healthy Life With Chronic Pain \(With Moving Easy CD\)](#) | This resource (available in paperback, e-book, CD, and MP3 formats) is based on the Chronic Pain Self-Management Program.



For more information visit: Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers | [KnowledgeHub.air.org](https://www.knowledgehub.air.org)

Endnotes

- 1 Lorig, K. R., Mazonson, P. D., & Holman, H. R. (1993). Evidence suggesting that health education for self-management in patients with chronic arthritis has sustained health benefits while reducing health care costs. *Arthritis & Rheumatology*, 36(4), 439–46.
- 2 Lorig et al. (1993)
- 3 Ruelman, L. S., Karoly, P., & Engers, C. (2012). A randomized controlled evaluation of an online chronic pain self-management program. *Pain*, 153(2), 319–30.
- 4 Lorig, K., Gonzalez, V. M., & Ritter, P. (1999). Community-based Spanish language arthritis education program: A randomized trial. *Medical Care*, 37(9), 957–63.
- 5 Lorig, K. R., Ritter, P. L., Laurent, D. D., & Plant, K. (2008). The internet-based arthritis self-management program: A one-year randomized trial for patients with arthritis or fibromyalgia. *Arthritis Care & Research: Official Journal of the American College of Rheumatology*, 59(7), 1009–17. Available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/art.23817>

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