

The risks of pharmaceutical use: Management techniques.

Please note that the information provided in this fact sheet does not constitute as medical advice, and should not be taken as such. Please consult your local health professional or GP before making changes to your use of prescribed medication.

Medically supervised use of pharmaceutical drugs may be the most appropriate approach for some people, particularly in the case of physical or mental pain that is acute and likely to be short-lived. However, the risk of non-prescribed pharmaceutical use and the harms associated with it, is high amongst people suffering from chronic pain, stress, anxiety and insomnia.

There is growing recognition of the benefits of alternative or complementary therapies in managing chronic pain, stress, anxiety or insomnia. Access to alternative or complementary therapies is an important aspect of a pain management strategy and can help to avoid over-reliance on pharmaceutical use.

Treatments can include:

1. **Counselling, especially cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).**
Chronic pain is identified as an issue of the central nervous system, but one that can be 'reprogrammed'.¹ There is evidence that CBT may be useful for the practical management of chronic pain.² CBT is particularly effective for managing anxiety and insomnia³ and can also help with stress management. CBT can support improvements in thoughts, feelings and behaviours.⁴ These improvements in turn reduce negative thoughts and feelings, and help to restore a sense of control.

Examples of online support tools include:

- **MindSpot Clinic**
Free online assessment tool and tool and treatment course, referral to other services – run by 30 psychologists, based at Macquarie University, Sydney, and funded by the Australian Government
- **Counselling Online – Turning Point**
Funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health
- **MoodGym**
Online learning of cognitive behaviour therapy skills – National Institute for Mental Health Research

2. **Relaxation techniques.**

Relaxation techniques include breathing and relaxing the muscles.⁵ It can help to relieve the symptoms of stress and anxiety and assist with sleep and pain management. When a person is stressed or anxious, hormones that are part of the 'fight or flight' response are released.⁶ Regularly using relaxation techniques can help to reduce this by calming the body so it doesn't trigger the release of these hormones. Examples of online support tools include:

- **ReachOut Breathe**
Helps reduce physical symptoms of stress and anxiety by slowing down heart rate using a mobile phone or Apple Watch - ReachOut

3. **Exercise and physical therapy.**

Regular physical activity can assist in improving energy levels, sleep, and lift moods.⁷ It's helpful in the management of anxiety and depression, and is an important contributor to physical and mental health.⁸ Guided physical therapy restores physical and emotional functioning to better manage chronic pain through muscle strengthening, postural training, and active self-management strategies.⁹

4. **Changes to diet and lifestyle.**

Diet has a direct impact on the brain and the rest of the body. Research is pointing to a link between poorer mental health and the modern 'western' diet high in refined grains, confectionary and take away foods.^{10,11,12} Generally, a balanced diet rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, lean proteins like fish, and whole grains is recommended.¹³ For information on how lifestyle changes can improve mental health, see:

- Healthy eating for people with depression, anxiety and related disorders - Eating well beyond blue

More information:

Australian Pain Management Association
1300 340 357
www.painmanagement.org.au

Pain Management Network
(02) 9464 4666
www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain

Getting help

If you are unsure or would like to know more about a medication you are taking, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Your doctor can inform you on the side effects or potential harms associated with both prescription and over-the-counter medication.

They can also assist you with a pain management strategy and inform you of the complementary or alternative therapies you can access.

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Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

Information on what to ask your GP • adf.org.au/insights/script-for-your-doctor/

For information on treatment

There are a range of treatment services available to support the recovery from an alcohol or drug dependency. To find out more information about treatment services in your area, contact the alcohol and drug intake and assessment service. **ACSO • 1300 022 760**
(9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

DirectLine is also available to provide free and confidential information, counselling and referral for alcohol and drug issues 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236 • www.directline.org.au

● Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 858 584

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am–5pm, Monday–Friday).

Medicines Line • 1300 633 424

Information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines (9am–5pm Monday–Friday).

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au

Support for families faced with problematic drug use.



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