



## Start the Conversation: *Information for Veterans Dealing With Chronic Pain*

Short-term pain (also called acute pain) is a useful signal that something may be wrong with our bodies and that we should take care of ourselves. Typically, once the source of pain (such as an injury) has resolved, the pain goes away. Longer-term pain (chronic pain) may persist for months or years.

Chronic pain may be due to an injury that permanently alters the body. For instance, some Veterans have chronic pain due to injuries that occurred in the military. Chronic pain can also persist even after an injury has healed or been resolved — for instance, when a Veteran experiences phantom limb pain after an amputation.

**Whether the source is known or unknown, Veterans suffering from chronic pain may need help.**

**If you are experiencing chronic pain, there are a few things you can do right away to deal with your symptoms:**

- ▶ Tell your doctor about it — a physician can help develop a treatment plan for you
- ▶ Educate yourself on chronic pain so you can decide on the best options for managing your condition
- ▶ Keep a “pain diary” to record how your experience of pain may change throughout the day and how pain affects your daily life
- ▶ Find ways to stay physically active, according to the recommendations of your doctor



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Your friends and family members have likely noticed that your chronic pain is affecting your well-being. Talking to them can be especially helpful as you look for the type of relief that is right for you.

**Depending on what is causing the pain, various treatment options may relieve it, such as:**

- ▶ Physical therapy to increase your level of pain-free activity
- ▶ Therapy or counseling to help you learn ways to manage your pain
- ▶ Relaxation techniques to manage the stress of chronic pain
- ▶ In some cases, prescription medications to reduce the level of severe pain

**WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHRONIC PAIN AFFECTS MY EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING?**

Many people who have chronic pain find that the constant discomfort and the restrictions it places on their daily activities contribute to feelings of sadness, irritability, or hopelessness. Some people may begin to feel depressed or helpless if they think the pain will never end and there is nothing they can do about it.

Not all distressing thoughts and emotions lead to a crisis — but if left unchecked, they could become a serious issue over time.

*Learn to recognize these warning signs of a mental health crisis. If you notice any of the following, get help immediately or encourage your Veteran to do so:*

- ▶ Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons
- ▶ Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- ▶ Looking for ways or having a set plan in place to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ▶ Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- ▶ Putting personal affairs in order or giving away possessions



It's important that you talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, death, or suicide. You can always contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** by calling **1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**, using the online chat, or **texting to 838255**. These services provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**

**For additional information and resources to help a Veteran you're concerned about, visit *Start the Conversation: New Tools for Veteran Suicide Prevention* at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation)**