

SEPTEMBER 2023

UI HEALTH CARE ORGAN TRANSPLANT CENTER

September is Pain Awareness Month

Chronic pain impacts millions of Americans. Pain is the body's way of indicating there could be something wrong that requires your attention. Pain Awareness Month aims to raise awareness of how prevalent pain is, educate on how to deal with pain, and collect funding for pain research.

Chronic pain is a serious health concern that can lead to isolation, insomnia, increased stress, depression, and anxiety in addition to its physical symptoms. Pain can also prevent individuals from being able to complete daily living needs, work, or socialize.

Pain can be felt as various sensations including burning, aching, stabbing, and pulsing. Not all chronic pain is curable, as it depends on what is causing it. There are effective treatments available to help you function and enjoy life.

Chronic Pain and Mental Health

Chronic pain is pain that lasts for three months or longer. Pain can come from an initial injury, there may be no clear cause. Women are more likely to experience chronic pain than men. Other factors including your age, mental health, and previous trauma can also impact risk for chronic pain.

Research shows that chronic pain and mental health are interconnected and can intensify one another. People with chronic pain are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, other mood disorders, and substance use disorders. It is important to treat both conditions when they occur together. A multidisciplinary approach is best.

The majority of people with pain say they experience feelings of anxiety or depression almost daily, and often feel stigmatized due to their pain. You have an impact on your physical health, so don't give up! There are support groups out there to validate, support, and encourage others to be successful in managing their pain.

Treatment Options

Medications play a role in treating chronic pain. However, your treatment plan should include more than just medication. This can be things like physical therapy, exercise, acupuncture, psychological treatment, mind/body techniques, and chiropractic treatment.

Common pain medications include over-the-counter medications (i.e. acetaminophen) and opioids. Over-the-counter medications are the most effective for mild to moderate pain, are generally considered to be safe, and relieve pain due to muscle aches and stiffness. Opioids are usually prescribed for new pain, known as acute pain. Opioids cause the most prescription medication-related overdose deaths in the U.S. Because of this, opioids are used at the lowest dose possible, usually for only a few days, and are a last resort for chronic pain medication.

As always, consult with your provider to determine the best chronic pain treatment plan for you. Treatment that works for one person may not work for another, and it can take time to find the right treatment for you. Advocate for yourself by asking your provider questions and discussing your medical care goals.

Changing Medicine.
Changing Lives.®