

Chronic Pain & Mental Health

How pain, fear, mood, sleep, avoidance, and identity can interact without implying that pain is “all in your head.”

Pain is real

Chronic pain has biological, psychological, and social dimensions. Stress and mood can influence pain intensity and coping without making the pain imaginary.

The pain-avoidance cycle

- Pain increases fear of activity.
- Activity shrinks to prevent flare-ups.
- Conditioning, confidence, sleep, and mood may worsen.
- Lower capacity can make everyday activity feel even harder.

Supportive approaches

- Use medical guidance for activity and treatment decisions.
- Pace activity rather than cycling between overdoing and collapse.
- Protect sleep and social connection.
- Notice catastrophic predictions about pain without dismissing physical limits.
- Build identity and valued activity alongside pain management.

Try this reflection

What valued activity has pain pushed out of your life, and what safer or smaller version might still be possible?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.