

Chronic Pain Management Algorithm

The chronic primary pain¹ management algorithm is intended to help providers guide patients with chronic pain to adequate care that is appropriate and cost-effective. Please see the phases below to evaluate chronic pain, develop a care plan and evaluate effectiveness of treatment.

Phase 1: Assessment with a Biopsychosocial Perspective

Biological Factors

- Pain generator
- Precise diagnosis
- Age
- Injury and past injury
- Illnesses
- Neurological factors
- Genetics and family history
- Hormones
- Obesity

Psychological Factors

- Behavioral health
- Mood/affect
- Stress
- Coping style and tools
- Trauma history
- Childhood factors
- Substance use

Social Factors

- Cultural
- Economic
- Social supports
- Spirituality
- Ethnicity
- Education
- Stigma

Pain Assessment

- Brief Pain Inventory
- Physical
- Neurological
- Spine/musculoskeletal

Functional Assessment

- Daily activities
- Work
- Exercise

Phase 2: Plan of Care with Universal and Specific Recommendations

Identify Functional Goals

- Work
- Exercise
- Daily activities
- Family interaction

Initial Treatment Options

- Non-pharmacologic (physical therapy, behavioral therapy, sleep)
- Intervention (correctible causes, surgical)
- Pharmacologic (NSAIDs, etc.), considering previous therapeutic classes tried and failed (ineffective, side effects, etc.) to guide treatment

Self-Management and Education

- Shared decision making
- Patient education
- Exercise, yoga and Tai Chi
- Mindfulness exercises

Neuropathic Conditions

- Neuropathies (diabetes, post herpetic, trigeminal)
- Nerve root compression
- Sciatica

Musculoskeletal and Mechanical Conditions

- Osteoarthritis
- Myofascial
- Degenerative disk disease
- Other neck/back pain
- Injuries

Inflammatory Conditions

- Inflammatory arthropathy (rheumatoid arthritis)

Multiple Etiologies

- Headache
- Central pain syndromes (post-stroke, complex regional pain syndrome)
- Fibromyalgia
- Behavioral

Treatment Options

- Injections (epidural, facet)
- Surgery
- Neuropathic pharmacologic agents
- Topical agents

Treatment Options

- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic
- Massage
- Trigger point injections
- Topical agents
- NSAIDs
- Acetaminophen

Treatment Options

- Heat and cold
- Joint injections
- NSAIDs
- Corticosteroids
- Acetaminophen
- Topical Agents
- Immune modulating agents

Treatment Options

- Address insomnia
- Exercise
- Physical therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Mindfulness

Phase 3: Periodic Evaluations



Pain Goals Met

- Continue current plan of care
- Periodically re-evaluate needs and adjust plan of care



Pain Goals Not Met

- Reassess
- Adjust plan of care (e.g., to include opioid trial)
- Refer to pain specialist

¹American Medical Association (AMA) definition of chronic primary pain: Three months of persistent pain in one or more anatomical regions that is unexplainable by another pain condition.