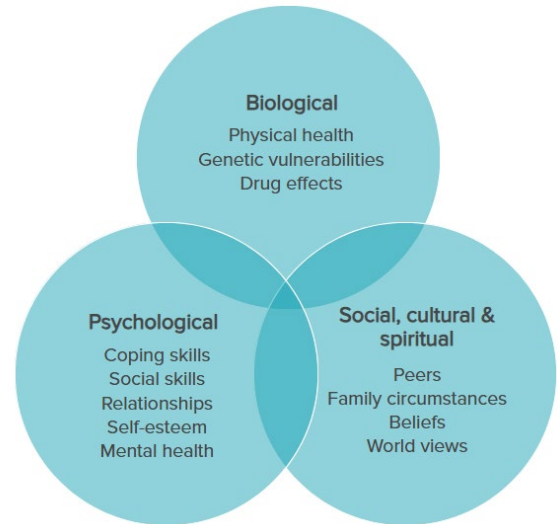


MENTAL HEALTH AND CHRONIC PAIN

Mental health and chronic pain are fundamentally connected. People living with mental illness are at higher risk of experiencing a wide range of chronic physical conditions. Conversely, people living with chronic pain experience depression and anxiety at twice the rate of the general population. Oftentimes, the physical, or biological, aspects of chronic pain are treated, but the emotional experience is not actively considered. However, the

[biopsychosocial model](#) approach to healthcare,

emphasizes that one's health is influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Therefore, treatment for pain should involve consideration of each aspect, including the psychological. **By caring for your mental health, you can positively impact your pain levels.**



TOOLS TO REGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

One way we can care for our mental health is by regulating our nervous system. Pain and emotions are processed in the same area of your brain. For example, physical symptoms like increased heart rates and shallow breathing which occur when you are feeling anxious or worried, can impact your pain. When you are feeling activated or having pain flare-ups, it can be helpful to train your body to be in a more relaxed state to ease some of the pain. You may consider utilizing the following tools and strategies to regulate your nervous system:

- [Box Breathing](#)
- [Breathing Balloon](#)
- [A 60-second meditation tool to help clear your mind](#)
- [Guided Meditation](#)
- [Grounding Exercises](#)
- Low-energy movements like yoga, chair yoga, and Tai chi - [Gentle Movement @ Home](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-TALK AND SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is the practice of treating yourself with kindness, care, and understanding – it's about recognizing your own suffering. Self-compassion and the way you talk to yourself are essential components for emotional health and are often not prioritized when you are feeling unwell or in pain.

Self-compassion...

- Can be helpful when dealing with difficult situations.
- Involves being aware of personal stressors or triggers and responding in ways that are helpful instead of harmful.
- Involves being aware of how critical and judgmental your mind can be when things get tough.
- Allows us to approach ourselves with curiosity and kindness when things don't work out as we may have hoped.

WAYS TO PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Acknowledge your pain: Notice when you're thinking unhelpful and hurtful thoughts, also known as "thinking traps". Allow yourself space and time to feel and process these thoughts. Some examples of thinking traps can be found [here](#).

Reframe your thought: When you catch yourself being self-critical or judgmental, you may consider challenging these thoughts by asking yourself questions like:

- "Is this really true?"
- "Is this a helpful thought for me?"
- "What would be a more accurate thing to say to myself?"
- "What would I say to a loved one if they were in the same situation?"

For example, a self-critical thought may be:

- "I haven't done my stretches, I'm hopeless and undisciplined."
- "I should be able to cope better, I'm pathetic and no-one will want to be my friend."

Imagine instead thinking the following:

- "I'm having a really hard time right now, I'm human and it's understandable I'm feeling down. How can I be kind to myself in this moment?"

Bringing kindness, rather than harsh self-criticism to yourself, will help soothe your nervous system and decrease your stress and pain levels in the long term.

Practice: Being self-compassionate takes practice. Depending on our unique experiences, this may or may not have been a skill we developed. As adults, we can choose to practice self-compassion until it becomes a part of our daily experiences. For more information about self-compassion, you may consider referencing the following resources:

- Self-Compassion Practices, Dr. Kristin Neff: self-compassion.org/self-compassion-practices
- Pain Waves Podcast, Mindfulness and Self-Compassion: liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/mind-body-techniques/mindfulness-and-self-compassion

FIND SUPPORT FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

As mentioned, chronic pain can greatly impact your emotional wellbeing, but you don't have to manage it alone. There is help available. You may consider utilizing the following resources for support and guidance on supporting your mental health:

- [Pain Support Line](tel:1-833-261-7246): 1-833-261-7246
- Pain BC Information Sheet, Finding a Mental Health Counsellor for Pain: painbc.ca/sites/default/files/2025-01/PBC%20Factsheet%20-%20Finding%20a%20Mental%20Health%20Counsellor%20-%20Final.pdf
- Pain Support and Wellness Groups: painbc.ca/supportgroups
- Coaching for Health: painbc.ca/coaching
- HelpStartsHere: helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca
- eMentalHealth: ementalhealth.ca
- Accessing support of a spiritual leader and/or Elder
- Identifying and seeking cultural supports, such as traditional healing practices or community-based support, can be an important source of help.
- Canadian Mental Health Association, BounceBack: bouncebackbc.ca
- Mood Disorders Association of BC: lookoutsociety.ca/mdabc
- Anxiety Canada: anxietycanada.com
- MindShift CBT, Free anxiety relief app: mindshiftcbt.com

While the above resources can help people work through emotional issues that lead to thoughts of suicide, you need help more urgently if you are in crisis. **For immediate mental health support, you may consider contacting the following:**

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8 or 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
- BC Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789 (no area code)
- [KUU-US Crisis Response Service](#) (for Indigenous, Metis and Inuit people): 1-800-588-8717
- [Hope For Wellness](#) (for Indigenous, Metis and Inuit people): 1-855-242-3310

RESOURCES

- Empowered Relief®: paincanada.ca/resources/empowered-relief
- Anxiety Canada, Thinking Traps: anxietycanada.com/downloadables/thinking-traps
- Pain BC, Psychosocial Community Resources: painbc.ca/find-help/resources/downloadables/psychosocial-community-resources
- Pain Waves Podcast, Yes and: Mental health and chronic pain: podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pain-waves/id1169792513
- Live Plan Be, Chronic Pain & Mental Health with Dr. Wesley Buch, R.Psych: liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/anxiety/chronic-pain-mental-health-with-dr-wesley-buch-rpsych
- Live Plan Be, Thinking and Depression: Changing Negative Thought Patterns: liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/depression/thinking-and-depression
- Live Plan Be, Psychological Factors in Pain: liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/anxiety/psychological-factors-in-pain
- Live Plan Be, Mindfulness, Emotions and Pain Treatment: liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/emotional-well-being/mindfulness-emotions-and-pain-treatment

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- Chronic pain in mental disorders: An umbrella review of the prevalence, risk factors, and treatments: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12438992