

Chronic Pain

Media Backgrounder

What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is defined as continuous and long-term pain lasting for more than 12 weeks.¹ Chronic pain can persist for months or even years and can be very difficult to treat.²

What causes chronic pain?

Chronic pain can occur anywhere in the body, with back pain being the most commonly reported location.³ It may follow an illness or an injury that appears to have healed or may develop for no apparent reason.

Chronic pain is classified as nociceptive and neuropathic⁴ and the underlying causes are various. Everyone will experience nociceptive pain at some point and this includes injuries, cuts or burns. Neuropathic pain is caused by a problem with the nerve pathways, which means the way the nervous system sends pain messages to the brain is affected.⁵

Who is affected by chronic pain?

Chronic pain is a widespread problem with 1 in 5 adults in Europe – or 100 million people – affected.³ Women are more likely to be affected by chronic pain than men.³

Chronic pain is also more common amongst people employed in jobs involving intense physical activity e.g. construction workers.⁶

Chronic pain can have a significant impact on people's quality of life.⁶ Without relief, chronic pain can disrupt daily routines, with everyday tasks such as cooking, shopping and housework becoming difficult to undertake. Chronic pain can also cause tiredness, depression and anxiety.⁷

Chronic pain is highlighted as one of the most prominent causes of disability worldwide by the Global Burden of Disease reviews.⁸ Despite its prevalence though, chronic pain is not fully understood.

- Over 50% of people with chronic pain wait at least two years before their pain is adequately managed.⁹
- Approximately one third of people with chronic pain in Europe are failing to receive adequate pain treatment.⁵
- On average, 38% of people in Europe with chronic pain report that their pain is not adequately managed with conventional treatments, such as drug therapy.⁹

Impact of chronic pain

As a result, chronic pain can result in direct and indirect implications on society including:

- The burden on healthcare resources – through direct and indirect costs – of chronic pain is significant. Chronic pain is estimated to cost European healthcare systems €300 billion per year.¹⁰
- Chronic pain can affect jobs and careers; 500 million days of illness per year are lost, costing the European economy more than €34 billion.¹¹
- The burden of chronic pain is expected to increase in line with an ageing population. By 2035, an estimated one quarter of the population in the European Union will be 65 or older – leading to additional pressures in already burdened healthcare systems.¹²

Treatments available for chronic pain

Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS)

Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) (sometimes known as neuromodulation) is an effective treatment option for people with chronic pain. SCS sends electrical impulses that activate nerve fibres along the spinal cord, masking the pain messages traveling to the brain. SCS has helped over 400,000 patients worldwide to find pain relief.¹³

With SCS, a small implanted pulse generator (or IPG) and thin wires (known as leads) are placed into the body. To help alleviate pain, the IPG electrically stimulates specific nerves in the spinal cord to mask the perception of pain signals that move along the spinal cord to the brain. SCS can be used to treat people with more than one particular pain including back or neuropathic pain.



For more information about SCS or chronic pain, visit: <http://www.bostonscientific.com/en-EU/news/newsroom-uk/chronic-pain.html>.

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- ⁹ Pain Proposal: Improving the Current and Future Management of Chronic Pain. A European Consensus Report (2010). http://www.dgss.org/fileadmin/pdf/Pain_Proposal_European_Consensus_Report.pdf
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- ¹³ International Neuromodulation Society (INS). Spinal Cord Stimulation's Role in Managing Chronic Disease Symptoms (2016). <http://www.neuromodulation.com/spinal-cord-stimulation>. Last accessed March 2017.

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