

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Pain (CBT-CP) as an effective, brief treatment for reducing the negative impacts of chronic pain on Veterans' lives. CBT-CP is available to Veterans throughout the VA health care system.



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For more information about CBT for Chronic Pain, please talk with your local VA provider.

www.va.gov



Cognitive Behavioral
Therapy for
CHRONIC PAIN





WHAT IS CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain is pain that persists for more than three months. It is a complex condition that influences behaviors, thoughts, and mood. People with chronic pain may experience consequences such as:

- Decreased physical, social, and recreational activities
- Feeling down, anxious, or irritable
- Poor performance at work, school, or home
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Trouble with attention, concentration, or memory

WHAT IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY FOR CHRONIC PAIN (CBT-CP)?

CBT-CP is a short-term treatment that aims to reduce the negative impacts of chronic pain on your life.

- The “**cognitive**” part of CBT-CP focuses on your thoughts, feelings, and expectations about chronic pain and how these may stand in the way of effective pain management.
- The “**behavioral**” aspect of CBT-CP helps you learn specific actions to respond to pain in more adaptive ways.

WHAT ARE THE OVERALL GOALS OF CBT-CP?

The goals of CBT-CP are to help improve your overall functioning and quality of life by learning effective skills for managing chronic pain.

DOES CBT FOR CHRONIC PAIN WORK?

CBT-CP is the most studied and supported psychological intervention for chronic pain. It is based on decades of research and has been shown to be very effective with Veterans and civilians. Although it is unrealistic to expect that chronic pain will disappear, the approaches learned in CBT-CP can help you do more of the things you would like to do by reacting to pain in a way that makes it feel less overwhelming.

CBT-CP HELPS TO:

- Change pain-related thoughts that interfere with your goals
- Participate in more recreational activities and social events
- Manage pain flare-ups more effectively
- Reduce worries about increased pain or injury

HOW LONG DOES CBT-CP LAST?

CBT-CP treatment consists of an assessment session and 10 active, skills-based therapy sessions. A follow-up session to review implementation and discuss any areas of difficulty is also encouraged. To maximize benefits, attending sessions weekly is recommended if possible.

IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE IN CBT-CP, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO:

- Attend sessions regularly
- Describe how pain impacts your life
- Work together with your therapist to set treatment goals
- Learn about chronic pain and ways to help improve your management of pain and its consequences
- Practice new CBT-CP skills in your life outside of session

To help ensure benefit from CBT-CP, you will need to be an active partner in your treatment. It is important that you discuss with your therapist any problems you have with recommendations made in the course of treatment and work with your therapist to come up with solutions to these problems.

Your therapist will help you make changes to everyday behaviors so that pain has less control over your life.

CAN I PARTICIPATE IN CBT-CP AND TAKE MEDICATION FOR PAIN AND/OR BE IN OTHER TYPES OF THERAPY AT THE SAME TIME?

You do not need to stop other mental health treatments or pain medications while you are participating in CBT-CP. This treatment helps you to develop skills that can be easily implemented while engaged in other forms of treatment. If you are taking pain medications and want to reduce or discontinue use, you should seek help from your prescribing provider. Your CBT-CP therapist will ask for your permission to communicate with other providers to keep them updated on your care.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF CBT-CP IS WORKING?

CBT-CP helps you learn to react to chronic pain in a way that reduces its negative effects on your life. Continued use of CBT-CP skills will be key to effectively managing your pain long after the therapy ends.

