

Chronic Pain in Adolescents: Empowering the Youth

It's estimated that 20-35% of children and adolescents worldwide are affected by chronic pain. This has an impact not only on the healthcare system, costing about \$19.5 billion per year in the US but also on the trajectory of these young people's lives.¹ An important question that can be asked in the clinical world is how do we meet these needs of these young people and help them on the road to management of their symptoms and ultimately better quality of life?

According to the WHO Guidelines on the management of chronic pain in children, their first best practice is: "Children with chronic pain and their families and caregivers must be cared for from a **biopsychosocial** perspective; pain should **not** be treated simply as a **biomedical** problem." This means that chronic pain is understood as having multiple dimensions and is complex. The other important best practice to note is that the care of the child should be child and family centered. This will look different for different families due to backgrounds, resources, values and preferences.²

Leake et al (2019)³ found seven key objectives when teaching adolescents about chronic pain that were recognized as important by clinicians and researchers:

1. Pain is a protector
2. The pain system can become overprotective
3. Pain is a brain output
4. Pain is not an accurate representation of tissue state
5. Many potential contributors to anyone's pain
6. We are all bioplastic
7. Pain education is treatment

It is important to note that as with any population, the more engaged they are in their own treatment, the better the outcomes. There are many means of helping young people (and adults) understand chronic pain. However, in this digital age, many kids are getting their information from online sources as well as social media. As an example, there are two YouTube videos that state 5 or more of these key objectives above:

1. Tame the Beast: [Tame The Beast — It's time to rethink persistent pain - YouTube](#)
2. Understanding Pain in less than 5 minutes: [Understanding Pain in less than five minutes - YouTube](#)

Using different forms of media can keep education engaging for this population. Additionally, there is a project that is being developed called Chronic pain project on Instagram which is having young people with chronic pain design education with the help of chronic pain professionals. This can be found @chronic_pain_project. (Note, there is nothing posted yet as this will be an ongoing project.)

There are still many gaps in the research and especially when it comes to physical therapy and the treatment of chronic pain in the younger population. There is low level evidence right now to support the use of physical

therapy for the treatment of chronic pain in this population compared to moderate evidence of psychological interventions and pharmacological interventions.² There is still much that can be done through physical therapy for the treatment of chronic pain in young people. Providing them with education on pain, guidance to increase their tolerance to physical activity as well as management strategies and referrals to other healthcare professionals such as psychologists are just some of the ways that we can provide care to this population.

REFERENCES

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