

painNEWS

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When Pain Medications Aren't Enough

MEDICAL MARIJUANA AND CHRONIC PAIN

Is Fibromyalgia Affecting Your Relationships?

DOCTOR'S ARTICLE

When Pain Medications Aren't Enough

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Physicians are frequently confronted with requests for increasing amounts of all forms of pain related medications. These requests often reflect a worsening in one or more underlying medical conditions, which intensifies pain. Providers then are confronted with a difficult choice: either increase medications to treat pain symptoms (thus increasing the possibility of addiction), or convince the patient to change their lifestyle and improve overall health, while consequently decreasing overall discomfort. Choosing the latter seems obvious, but achieving this is an entirely different matter. How can patients help us treat their pain?

All patients should have a primary care provider, along with a routine physical examination each year. The onset of new pain symptoms should result in a prompt follow up appointment, but often that does not occur. Furthermore, primary care practices avoid prescribing long-term pain medications. ERs and urgent care clinics then become another option, but generally are unwilling to treat chronic pain also. It is important that you notify your doctor of any changes in health, including the onset or worsening of pain. A primary care clinic can also order many of the labs, imaging, and other tests necessary to begin to evaluate the cause of all types of discomfort.

You must also have a diagnosis to treat pain. Back and neck pain, burning in your hands and feet, etc. are each symptoms. Treating symptoms without a specific diagnosis is appropriate for acute pain (pain of less than six weeks duration). Management of chronic pain requires a diagnosis identifying abnormal anatomy, physiology, or both. It is important to note that chronic pain should not be treated the same as acute pain, as the treatment will not be as successful.

Pain alone also does not determine treatment. Medical conditions (known as "co-morbidities") impact the duration and severity of pain. Unless all co-morbidities are adequately evaluated, no single pain treatment plan can be considered complete. In general, some of the most common co-morbidities are (in no particular order): (1) obesity, (2) diabetes, (3) smoking, and (4) addictive behaviors. It is also not surprising that these comprise or often lead to many of the general health problems encountered within our region.

Using opioid pain medications alone reflects an inadequate treatment of co-morbidities. Many patients suffer from neuropathy, or painful nerves. The causes of neuropathy are many; some may be irreversible, like following chemotherapy for cancer. Many however can improve with better management of co-morbidities. Weight loss can improve back discomfort as well as diabetes. Smoking can damage nerves directly, or lead to blood vessel disease, which can mimic neuropathy. Each can play a role in improving or eliminating symptoms, leading to fewer medications or none at all.

Recognizing that we each have some addictive behaviors can lead to improved self-control and better health. Acknowledging harmful behaviors is the first step. Developing ways to avoid or eliminate them is as effective, or more effective, than any medication we can prescribe. All physicians treat acute pain. Pain Medicine clinics are best suited to treat chronic pain, as well as pain that is acute. The TriState Pain Institute is committed to providing the options that allow you to better manage chronic pain. We are only but a first step. By taking responsibility for your health, you then become a partner in treating your pain. It is a partnership we value, and is at the foundation of why we exist.

For more about options for treating chronic pain beyond just medications, please contact the Tristate Pain Institute at (928) 788-3333.

Is Fibromyalgia Affecting Your Relationships?

It's no secret that a chronic illness like fibromyalgia can strain friendships, work relationships, and romantic relationships. This strain can be even greater for those recently diagnosed with the debilitating condition. While these moments may feel like your darkest days, there are alternative therapies, interventional treatments, and educational resources that can help combat emotional and physical pain.

Fibromyalgia may seem like a defining characteristic in your life, but it doesn't have to be. The pain specialists at the TriState Pain Institute understand you're going through a difficult time, which is why they want to help you educate your friends, families, and partners about this condition. According to the National Fibromyalgia & Chronic Pain Association, one in four people believe their spouse or partner does not understand their condition.

Additionally, half of the 6,000 people polled in the association's survey stated fibromyalgia damaged a current or previous relationship with a spouse or partner. Unfortunately, many people diagnosed with fibromyalgia may feel inadequate or guilty for not investing more time or energy into their relationships. The pain may become so unbearable that a patient's focus shifts from keeping the relationship going to mustering the strength to get out of bed in the morning.

There is a light at the end of this tunnel. Educating yourself and a loved one about fibromyalgia can help both of you develop a better understanding of your condition. First and foremost, it may be worthwhile to provide your

loved one with medical brochures and links to fibromyalgia associations and support groups.

Connecting your loved one to these resources could help paint a much clearer picture of how the disease affects every life it impacts.

If you believe more needs to be done to demonstrate the severity of this condition, you are welcome to bring your loved one to your next appointment with one of the providers at the TriState Pain Institute. We understand that underlying conditions, lifestyle choices, and strained relationships can impact pain, making it worse. It's our goal to develop programs that are directed at a healthier future.

If you do not have fibromyalgia, but know someone who does, we recommend the following tips:

- **Educate yourself about fibromyalgia.**
- **Don't take cancellations personally; pain flare-ups can happen at the most inconvenient times, so don't get upset or frustrated when a loved one cancels their plans with you.**
- **Offer to help your loved one with daily chores, like going grocery shopping or doing some cleaning.**
- **Be a good listener; try to be supportive and empathetic toward your loved one's condition.**

At the TriState Pain Institute, pain should never negatively impact your journey or quality of life. Talk to your pain specialist about ways to help your loved ones understand fibromyalgia.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA & CHRONIC PAIN

Medical marijuana is an effective, yet controversial treatment option for those suffering from chronic pain. While there is much to be learned about this alternative therapy, studies have found medical marijuana possesses pain relieving properties. Additionally, some clinical evidence supports the use of medical marijuana for patients suffering from chronic pain syndromes.

A Canadian research team led by Dr. Mark Ware, director of clinical research for the Alan Edwards Pain Management Unit at McGill University Health Center in Montreal, found patients who used marijuana to ease their pain did not have an increased risk of serious side effects. Another benefit included an overall improvement in mood and quality of life.

If you suffer from chronic pain and are interested in using medical marijuana, talk to your TriState Pain Institute physician today about your options. Getting certified for medical marijuana is an extensive process that requires a physician's prescription or recommendation. Below is more information on the certification process:

- First, qualifying patients must have a "debilitating medical condition" certified by their health care provider before they can apply for a medical marijuana license.**
- Second, after Dr. Venger's approval, patients must submit a Qualifying Patient Application to the ADHS before medical marijuana can be dispensed.**
- Third, the application will have to be approved by the ADHS before a license can be created and provided to the patient. Once approved, patients can work with their provider for recommended dosages.**

For patients under 18, a parent or legal guardian must be complete an Attestation form when submitting their child's application for a registry identification card.



If you're interested in learning more about medical marijuana, talk to your pain specialist to find out more.

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