



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Living with Pain

Prevalence of Chronic Pain and High-Impact Chronic Pain Among Adults — United States, 2016

Recorded: September 11, 2018; posted: September 13, 2018

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Dooling] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Kathleen Dooling.

Occasional aches and pains are an expected part of life, but for many people, pain is a constant companion.

Dr. Chad Helmick is with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He's joining us today to discuss ways to manage chronic pain. Welcome to the show, Chad.

[Dr. Helmick] Thank you.

[Dr. Dooling] Chad, how many people in the U.S. suffer from chronic pain?

[Dr. Helmick] In 2016, 50 million adults had chronic pain, which is pain on most every day in the past six months. More interesting though is that 20 million people have high impact chronic pain, which is chronic pain that also limits their work or life activities on most every day in the past six months. This is a problem because chronic pain is associated not only with the symptoms but with anxiety and depression, reduced quality of life, and the risk of opioid problems.

[Dr. Dooling] What are the most common causes of chronic pain?

[Dr. Helmick] The most common causes generally relate to the bones and joints, like low back pain and arthritis, but there are many other causes—headaches, sickle cell disease, fibromyalgia, surgery and injuries, and many, many others.

[Dr. Dooling] Is chronic pain more common in any particular group of people?

[Dr. Helmick] Yes, it occurs at all ages but it's more common in older middle-aged adults and in the oldest old, 85 and older. It's also more common in women, poor people, and those who live in rural areas.

[Dr. Dooling] How is chronic pain treated?

[Dr. Helmick] Well the first thing to do is to get a diagnosis which can help guide treatment, but the thinking about chronic pain now is that it becomes a chronic disease by itself, regardless of the cause and that can cause significant problems. The real goal in management is to have a

manageable level of pain, not to get rid of all pain. There are several steps that can be taken, and these are sometimes difficult to do because of barriers to access, but it makes sense to do the simplest and safest things first and these are non-drug steps, things like physical activity, walking is perfectly good to help reduce pain. Also, self-management education can give you some confidence in managing chronic pain when you're on your own. There's also physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychological therapy, better sleep, which usually means less alcohol, and seeing a chiropractor, getting biofeedback, and massage. If that's not enough, non-opioid drugs, like Tylenol or Motrin and Advil or Naprosyn or Aleve can help. If those don't work, then it's time to consider something stronger, sometimes that's opioids, but there's not great evidence that opioids are good for long-term pain in most people.

[Dr. Dooling] Do you have any advice for people suffering from chronic pain?

[Dr. Helmick] Well, it's important to work with a variety of providers who are working together to help you. The goal, again, is manageable pain so you can live a productive life. This can include physical therapy and most people can walk, to treat any underlying depression and anxiety, and to avoid further injuries. Finally, the National Pain Strategy is laying out a strategic road map to improve pain management system in this country.

[Dr. Dooling] Where can listeners get more information about managing chronic pain?

[Dr. Helmick] Listeners can go to the NIH website, nih.gov, and type in National Pain Strategy.

[Dr. Dooling] Thanks, Chad. I've been talking today with Dr. Chad Helmick about ways to manage chronic pain.

If you're experiencing daily pain, talk with your health care provider to ensure you have the correct diagnosis and know how to manage your condition.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Kathleen Dooling for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.