Managing long-term illness and chronic conditions
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Worrying or thinking negatively about possible situations adds to your anxiety or stress, affecting your overall health. Ways to reduce worrying include:

- Find information about your prognosis and likely outcomes – you may feel more in control.
- Focus on a variety of things each day – give yourself daily tasks and make time to read, walk or watch a movie. Do activities that challenge your mind, such as
- Listen to podcasts or audiobooks
- Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing
- Talk to a friend, join a support group or seek specialist help through a psychologist or psychiatrist. They can help you realistically assess your worries.
- Find information about your prognosis and likely outcomes – you may feel more in control.
- Focus on a variety of things each day – give yourself daily tasks and make time to read, walk or watch a movie. Do activities that challenge your mind, such as
- Listening to music
- Engaging in physical activity
- Engaging in creative activities such as painting or writing

Summary

- If you have a long-term illness or chronic condition, keep your doctor informed about changes in your health and discuss how often you will need check-ups.
- Social support can help you maintain your quality of life when you are not well – plan to catch up with friends and family. Support groups can help too.
- If you feel your condition is overwhelming you emotionally, it is important that you speak to your doctor or another healthcare professional about your feelings.
- Positive lifestyle factors like a healthy diet, regular exercise and good sleep can help relieve or manage your symptoms.

A long-term illness or chronic health condition is any condition lasting six months or longer, such as asthma, arthritis, cancer, obesity, diabetes, chronic pain or heart disease. The incidence of many long-term illnesses and chronic conditions is increasing in Australia and the rest of the world due to a range of factors, including an ageing population and lifestyle issues such as smoking and poor diet.

Modern-day treatments also mean that people are living longer with diseases that previously caused premature death.

Many long-term illnesses and chronic conditions:

- are caused by a number of different health factors occurring at the same time
- take some time to develop
- last for a long time, often leading to other health problems.

Maintaining your best quality of life with a chronic condition

Chronic conditions are rarely cured completely, so looking after yourself will be about good medical advice, living a healthy lifestyle and having a positive attitude.

To maintain your best quality of life, you or your carer can help by:

- finding reliable information about the disease, its treatment and management – will help you feel you are taking a positive step and give you a feeling of control over your illness
- understanding your medication, including what it is specifically for, any special instructions and potential side effects
- setting yourself goals – short-term goals will give you a sense of how you are progressing
- developing skills to manage your pain and fatigue
- getting emotional support – speak to others who are going through what you are, as well as leaning on family and friends when you need to
- planning for the future – be realistic about your future health and discuss this with your doctor.

Pain management

Managing the pain associated with a chronic illness may include taking pain-relieving medication, undergoing physical therapies (such as physiotherapy) and other therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

Medication for pain relief includes non-prescription (over-the-counter) medication such as paracetamol (such as Panadol), prescription medication such as morphine, and may include complementary medicines.

There are also many non-drug treatments available to help you manage your pain. A combination of treatments and therapies is often more effective than just one.

Some non-drug pain-management strategies include:

- cognitive behavioural therapy – to help you learn to change how you think and, in turn, how you feel and behave about pain
- physical therapies – stretching, walking and other exercise can help relieve pain, depending on the cause
- relaxation and stress management techniques – including meditation and yoga
- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) therapy – where a small electrical current passes through the skin via electrodes, prompting a pain-relieving response from the body
- heat or cold – heat packs can relieve pain from musculoskeletal injuries, and ice packs can help reduce swelling immediately after an injury
- massage – this is more suited to soft-tissue injuries and should be avoided if the pain originates in the joints
- acupuncture – involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the skin to encourage the body to heal itself and release endorphins, which are natural pain-relieving compounds within the body.

Always be guided by your doctor or healthcare team, and follow their instructions carefully to avoid making your pain worse.

Looking after your mental health

The symptoms of chronic disease, like tiredness, aches and pains, are often not visible, so others cannot always appreciate their effects. It is not just physical symptoms that can affect a person, but the limits on lifestyle and living with constant pain can take a toll mentally as well.

Worrying or thinking negatively about possible situations adds to your anxiety or stress, affecting your overall health. Ways to reduce worrying include:

- When you find yourself starting to worry, write down your concerns and, importantly, the possible consequences, even if they are negative.
- Find information about your prognosis and likely outcomes – you may feel more in control.
- Talk to a friend, join a support group or seek specialist help through a psychologist or psychiatrist. They can help you realistically assess your worries.
- Focus on a variety of things each day – give yourself daily tasks and make time to read, walk or watch a movie. Do activities that challenge your mind, such as

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Research shows that poor mental health can actually make your physical symptoms worse. This is called ‘psychiatric morbidity’. Victorian public hospitals offer ‘consultation liaison psychiatry’ services to help prevent, diagnose and treat this condition in hospital patients who are being treated for a physical health problem. Ask your doctor about these services next time you are in hospital.

If when you are at home you feel your condition is overwhelming you emotionally, it is important that you speak to your doctor or another healthcare professional about your feelings. Staying as well as you can when living with a chronic condition or long-term illness will give you the best quality of life.

Good lifestyle choices with a chronic condition

We know from research that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help you feel as well as you can while living with a chronic condition. This includes eating well, doing as much physical activity as your condition will allow and getting good rest.

Maintaining a healthy diet can be helped by:

- having small amounts of food often, even if you do not feel like eating, rather than three heavy meals
- choosing nutritious foods that you enjoy
- avoiding sugar-, salt- or fat-laden snack foods
- telling your family and friends about your dietary needs so they can support you.

Trying to do some physical activity each day, even if it is only a small amount, can help with managing pain and lift your mood. Speak with your doctor or physiotherapist about exercise that may help your condition.

Sleep is also very important if you have a health condition. To help you get enough good sleep:

- Avoid napping during the day.
- Avoid excessive bed rest whenever possible.
- Avoid stimulants, such as caffeine, before bed.
- If you are able, exercise during the day so your body is tired at night.

Dealing with multiple health conditions

Dealing with multiple conditions may mean that you need to deal with a number of healthcare professionals. The most important thing to remember about seeing multiple healthcare professionals is to let each one know who else you are seeing and for what health condition.

Most importantly, let them know what other treatments and medication you are having. Sometimes, medication can have a negative effect on you if it is taken at the same time as another. This includes complementary medicines, such as herbal supplements.

Managing your healthcare team

Sometimes, your healthcare can be better coordinated if your various health professionals talk to each other directly, but you need to give them your permission first.

Allowing all the members of your healthcare team to share information about your care helps them to gain a more holistic view of you and your healthcare needs. It can help you to:

- avoid having to repeat health information for each practitioner
- avoid having to re-take medical tests, such as scans and blood tests
- understand which healthcare professional to ask about which problem.

To help coordinate your health information among the members of your healthcare team:

- Give consent for all the members of your healthcare team to share information about your care.
- Appoint one healthcare professional, usually your local doctor, to oversee all your care (including drawing up a treatment plan, which can be shared). This will help you and your doctor track your care and find problems more easily.
- Write down your health professionals’ names and what they do in your care. Give each of them a copy of this information.
- Ask the other members of your healthcare team to tell your primary doctor about tests, medicines, treatments, physical therapy or food limitations they have suggested or prescribed.
- Ask each member of your team questions about your care and keep notes on the answers in a notebook. Take this notebook to all appointments for easy reference.

Support from others – support groups, family and friends

Social support can help you maintain your quality of life when you have a long-term health condition. To help you find and maintain both practical and emotional support:

- Plan to catch up with family and friends. Keep a regular schedule of contact throughout each week.
- Tell your family and friends about your condition, and let them know how they can help you.
- Consider new sources of support, such as support groups, clubs, interest groups and volunteer opportunities.

Support groups allow you to both get and provide advice and support – to connect with people who are experiencing what you are also experiencing. They can increase your knowledge about your condition or illness and help you learn to live more comfortably with it.

There are hundreds of support groups in Australia and their arrangements vary. Many are centred on regular meetings held in a healthcare facility, community centre, local hall or council meeting room. Others are online, offering a variety of ways to connect, including message boards and chat forums.

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To find a support group, you can:

- ask your doctor or specialist
- ask someone you know who has experience with the same condition or healthcare need
- look online or in the phone book
- search the ‘Services and support’ gateway on this website.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist
- Counsellor

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

1/4 How would you rate this website?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Fair
- Poor

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries.
If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

2/4 Your Comments

Tell us who you are  Select an option
Enter your comments below (optional)

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

3/4 Questions

What are you here to do? Looking for information on
Did you find what you were looking for?

- Yes
- No

Send us your feedback
Health system explained

Healthcare system in Victoria

The Victorian healthcare system comprises a wide range of health professionals working alongside one another to provide medical and health services...

Immunisations - vaccinations in Victoria, Australia (video)

Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved...

Patient-centred care explained

Patient-centred care, also known as ‘person-centred care’, is about treating the person receiving the care in the way they want to be treated...

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) helps cover the cost of a wide range of prescription medicines, making them more affordable...

Primary healthcare explained

Primary healthcare is the first contact a person has with the health care system when they have a health problem. This is usually your general practitioner (GP) or pharmacist...

Working with your healthcare team

If you see a number of healthcare professionals, it is important to tell them about any other healthcare services you are using...

Young people and health services

There are many subsidised and free medical, dental, mental, community health services available to support young people in Victoria...

Prepare and research

3 steps to better health (video)

Ways to improve your understanding of your health...

Finding reliable health information

Trusted health information can be found through your local doctor or pharmacy and other reliable health providers...

General practitioner (GP) services

A general practitioner (GP) is a doctor who is also qualified in general medical practice. GPs are often the first point of contact for someone, of any age, who...
feels sick or has a health concern...

- **Healthcare decision-making – options, benefits and risks**
  
  Ask a doctor and research health information when making a health decision. This will include the cost, timing and regularity of medical treatment...

- **Health information and health products online**
  
  Don't use online health information to self-diagnose - always see your doctor or healthcare professional...

- **Medical tourism and insurance**
  
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Medicine information leaflets for consumers**
  
  A Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflet gives you accurate information about the safety of your medication and how best to take it...

### Making decisions on treatment and care

- **Advance care plans**
  
  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want...

- **After-hours healthcare options**
  
  For unexpected after-hours medical issues, there are telephone helplines, pharmacies, after-hours medical clinics or doctors who can visit you at home...

- **Making healthcare decisions for someone else**
  
  Family members may be involved in making healthcare decisions for you if you are unable to make decisions and it is not a medical emergency...

- **Medical tourism and insurance**
  
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Second opinions**
  
  You have the right to ask a doctor for a second opinion if you are unsure about your doctor's suggested medical treatment or a diagnosis...

- **Types of doctors and health professionals**
  
  Doctors and other health professionals all have a different role to play in your healthcare...

### Maintaining and tracking health and care

- **Immunisations - vaccinations in Victoria, Australia (video)**
  
  Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved...

- **Making plans and decisions for the end of your life**
  
  Planning and making decisions about the end of your life can be a positive experience. It is a good opportunity to reflect on the things that are important to you, and to make arrangements that suit...

- **Managing long-term illness and chronic conditions**
  
  Chronic condition management includes positive lifestyle factors like a healthy diet, regular exercise, good sleep and social support...

- **Managing your health**
  
  You can manage your health by learning about healthy living, taking steps to prevent disease and having regular health checks with your doctor...

- **Regular health checks**
  
  Regular health checks can help you identify any early signs of health issues...

- **Safe medication use**
  
  Find out how to use medication properly, so you can avoid problems such as unwanted effects and other adverse reactions...

### Taking charge of rights and responsibilities

- **Advance care plans**
  
  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want...

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• Complaints about health services
  The Health Complaints Commissioner can accept complaints about anyone who claims to provide a health service.
• Confidentiality and privacy in healthcare
  There are laws that set out how healthcare professionals can collect and store your health information and when they are allowed to share it.

Paying for healthcare

• Medical tourism and insurance
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...
• Paying for healthcare
  Ask your doctor and healthcare providers what you will be charged for each new service, what is covered by Medicare and what is included in your healthcare plan.
• Understanding health insurance
  There are many health insurance providers on the market that offer a wide variety of healthcare plans...
• Understanding Medicare
  Medicare is Australia’s national public health insurance, providing free or subsidised healthcare to all Australians and most permanent residents.

Communicating about health

• 3 steps to better health (video)
  Ways to improve your understanding of your health...
• Advance care plans
  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want...
• Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion
  The first International Conference on Health Promotion was a response to growing expectations for a new public health movement...
• Preparing for a health or medical appointment
  Get the most out of your consultation by preparing for your health or medical appointment...
• Second opinions
  You have the right to ask a doctor for a second opinion if you are unsure about your doctor's suggested medical treatment or a diagnosis...
• Talking with your doctor about sensitive issues
  Building a strong, trusting relationship with your doctor can make it easier to talk with them about sensitive issues...
• Translating and Interpreting Service
  The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is an Australian Government interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for organisations that need to speak with their non...
• Working with your healthcare team
  If you see a number of healthcare professionals, it is important to tell them about any other healthcare services you are using...

Home and community support and equipment

• Aids and equipment at home
  Disability aids and equipment such as wheelchairs, walking frames and braces can help people with disabilities and the elderly gain more independence...
• Children and health services
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria...
• Healthcare and support at home
  Home care services are available for people recovering from illness or surgery, frail older people, the elderly and people with disabilities...
• Healthcare and support in the community

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There is a range of community health services and supports available for people with disabilities and the elderly still living independently at home...

- **Support groups**
  Support groups offer valuable advice and support and give you the chance to share information with others in a similar situation to you...

### Related Information

- **Asthma explained**
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives...

- **Asthma management**
  An asthma action plan can help you take control of your asthma and feel confident managing it...

- **Asthma-friendly home**
  There are many ways in which you can transform your home into an asthma-friendly environment...

- **Epidemic Thunderstorm Asthma**
  People who have asthma or hay fever can get severe asthma symptoms during pollen season when high grass pollen counts combine with a certain type of thunderstorm...

- **Avoiding asthma triggers**
  Asthma triggers are substances, conditions or activities that lead to symptoms of asthma. Asthma symptoms include difficulty breathing, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can...

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**Find a doctor**

Need to find a doctor in your local area. Take a look at the general practitioners entry in our health service profiles.

**General practitioner (GP) services**

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**Service Search**

Find services near you

Service: Select a service

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37 people have watched a video today

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  - Services and support

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