

Patients who suffer chronic pain are over-represented in vulnerable populations. Many patients carry a burden of chronic disease and may be more susceptible to COVID-19 and its complications and consequences. Family physicians must be proactive in creating plans with patients on how to manage pain and reduce risks throughout the pandemic.

### Pain Support Line

The Pain BC Pain Support Line is available on weekdays by calling 1-844-880-PAIN (toll-free) or by emailing [supportline@painbc.ca](mailto:supportline@painbc.ca).

#### CONTINUE APPOINTMENTS BY PHONE OR VIDEO

Monitor how pain is impacting the patient's physical and emotional functioning, as well as their capacity to sustain ongoing treatment.

Create a plan with the patient on how to continue appointments in the event of a return of lockdown restrictions, including scheduling regular appointments. Provide anticipatory guidance on managing mental health throughout any further waves of the pandemic.

#### HELP MANAGE ANXIETY

The pandemic has increased anxiety and depression among the general population. Many individuals who suffer chronic pain experience an increase in pain correlated to higher stress and anxiety levels. Moreover, those who live with chronic pain have been unable to access personal services (physiotherapy, massage, etc.) that may help alleviate stress and pain. Family physicians can help their patients identify how their pain is amplified by increased stress and direct them to approach this problem mindfully.

Support people with chronic pain in managing anxiety by recommending physical activity, breathing exercises, and virtual counselling services. [Pain BC](#) offers Mindful Hand Drumming @ Home and Gentle Movement @ Home, among many other online programs to support those who experience pain to reduce stress and increase movement at home. Additional wellness tools can be found at [www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19/](http://www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19/)

#### ENCOURAGE A HEALTHY DIET

Disruptions to routine, increased anxiety and difficulty accessing supplies may lead to a change in eating habits. In some patients, high-fiber foods, such as whole grains, nuts, seeds, as well as omega-3 fats, can help lower inflammation and improve function. Be mindful that weight gain can exacerbate chronic pain.

#### MANAGE PRESCRIPTION SUPPLIES

Review patients' medication and medical supplies to ensure adequate supply (one to three months) and advise on how to collect refills safely. Many pharmacies are offering free delivery and dedicated shopping hours for people in need of special consideration.

Health Canada finds no scientific evidence supporting a link between ibuprofen, naproxen or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and more severe COVID-19 symptoms. Encourage open conversations about all the medications that your patients are taking.

#### OPIOID AND STEROID USE

Patients who suffer chronic pain are more vulnerable to accidental overdose throughout the pandemic. See the [BCCDC's guidance on harm reduction](#). Provide naloxone education and prescription for patients at high risk.

Patients with COVID-19 who are receiving opioids can be more susceptible to respiratory depression; and the absorption of fentanyl and buprenorphine through transdermal routes may increase with fever.

Steroids increase the potential for adrenal insufficiency and altered immune response.

Family physicians should review the risks/benefits of opioid and steroid use and encourage patient education on these issues.

#### ENCOURAGE SAFE SOCIAL CONNECTION

Patients with chronic pain often experience social isolation as a result of their condition. Identify resources and support groups they can connect with virtually.

**Patients can call 2-1-1 for help in accessing local supports.**

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BCCFP COVID-19 Resources: [www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19](http://www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19)  
[www.drugpolicy.ca/covid-19-harm-reduction-resources/](http://www.drugpolicy.ca/covid-19-harm-reduction-resources/)  
[www.painbc.ca/covid-19-news-and-resources-people-living-pain](http://www.painbc.ca/covid-19-news-and-resources-people-living-pain)

#### SOURCES

[www.asra.com/page/2903/recommendations-on-chronic-pain-practice-during-the-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.asra.com/page/2903/recommendations-on-chronic-pain-practice-during-the-covid-19-pandemic)  
[www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2020/72633a-eng.php](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2020/72633a-eng.php)  
[www.medpagetoday.com/clinical-challenges/pain-management/85857](http://www.medpagetoday.com/clinical-challenges/pain-management/85857)