

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Non-gynecologic overlapping pain conditions: IC, IBS, Fibromyalgia, Chronic Low Back Pain and Migraines

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Which of the overlapped conditions should I treat first?

At first, treatment of chronic overlapping pain conditions may seem overwhelming. However, treatment options such as life-style changes for one type of chronic pain may also be helpful for another type. Therefore, you might not need to decide which pain condition to treat first, because you can treat several conditions at once. Other times, you might have a specific chronic pain condition that is preventing you from starting or continuing treatment for another chronic pain condition. Therefore, you and your doctor should work together to decide on a treatment plan that focuses on the areas that are most important to you. By selecting a focus area, you can set small attainable goals to improve your quality of life despite your current pain level. Over time, these small goals will help you achieve larger treatment goals.

Why do I have so many pain conditions?

Once a person develops a chronic pain condition, they often develop other types of chronic pain conditions. Women develop chronic pain conditions more often than men. Scientists do not know exactly why, but the reason is possibly related to how the brain and the nervous system, interpret pain signals from around the body. The brain and nervous system take information from the world around you (such as sound and touch) and tell your body how to react (such as moving away from was touched). When your body is exposed to an injury or trauma, the brain takes the signal from the injured area and interprets it as pain. Sometimes, the brain and the nervous system interpret a signal as painful even if there was no injury or after the injury has healed. How the brain interprets a signal, depends on many factors. For example, if the brain has mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety, then you may feel more pain, or be more affected by the pain. Previous experiences and expectations also change how your brain and nervous system react to pain. Chronic pain can change the way the brain reacts to normal everyday information. The brain and nervous system could perceive pain from things (like sound or touch) that normally are not painful to others or to you at an earlier time in your life. There are multiple ways that the brain and nervous system can develop increased sensitivity (hypersensitivity) including genetics and previous emotional or physical traumas.

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Is a single therapy available to treat my all my pain?

No, there is not. When a person has multiple chronic pain conditions, many therapies are used at the same time to address all aspects of the pain. Lifestyle changes such as dietary changes, staying physically active, mindfulness, improving sleep, decreasing stress, and improving self-care are helpful for many pain conditions. Different medications may be added to lifestyle changes to improve symptoms. Mental health specialists can help you practice techniques to reduce pain and is an extremely important part of improving chronic pain. Physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, or chiropractic medicine are also useful parts of treating chronic pain. It may take some time to find treatment combination that helps your symptoms. Because combination treatment is best, your treatment team may involve many doctors and other treatment specialists.

How long will I be treated before I can see improvement?

Usually, treatment for chronic overlapping pain conditions takes about 2-3 months to take effect. On average, it will take 8-12 weeks for your healthcare professionals to find a treatment regimen that works best for you. How well a treatment works is as important as the side effects it can cause. For example, you may start on a medication that works well to control the pain but causes you to be sleepy. If you have a job where you cannot be sleepy, then your healthcare professional may recommend a different treatment, even though the first treatment worked. Treatment for chronic overlapping pain conditions also requires multiple specialists. Sometimes, it takes several weeks to establish care with those specialists.

How long does treatment last and is there a cure for chronic overlapping pain conditions?

There is no cure for this type of pain. However, with treatment, you can live a health and productive life. Also, our understanding of chronic overlapping pain conditions has improved a lot over the last 10 years, so there will likely be continued progress and more treatments available in the future. Stress, anxiety, and lack of activity, are detrimental to your health and interfere with your ability to control pain, so healthy life style is a key part of doing better in the long term.

Resources for management of chronic overlapping pain conditions

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PAINWeek Chronic Overlapping Pain Conditions

<https://www.painweek.org/media/video/chronic-overlapping-pain-conditions-definition-and-causes>

Chronic Pain Research Patient Guide

http://www.chronicpainresearch.org/public/CPRA_Patient_Guide.pdf

International Pelvic Pain Society Patient Education Pamphlets: www.pelvicpain.org