

## Breaking the cycle of chronic pain

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### Why do children and teens develop chronic pain in their muscles and joints?

Children and teens may first have pain because of a 'trigger' such as an injury, infection or health condition.

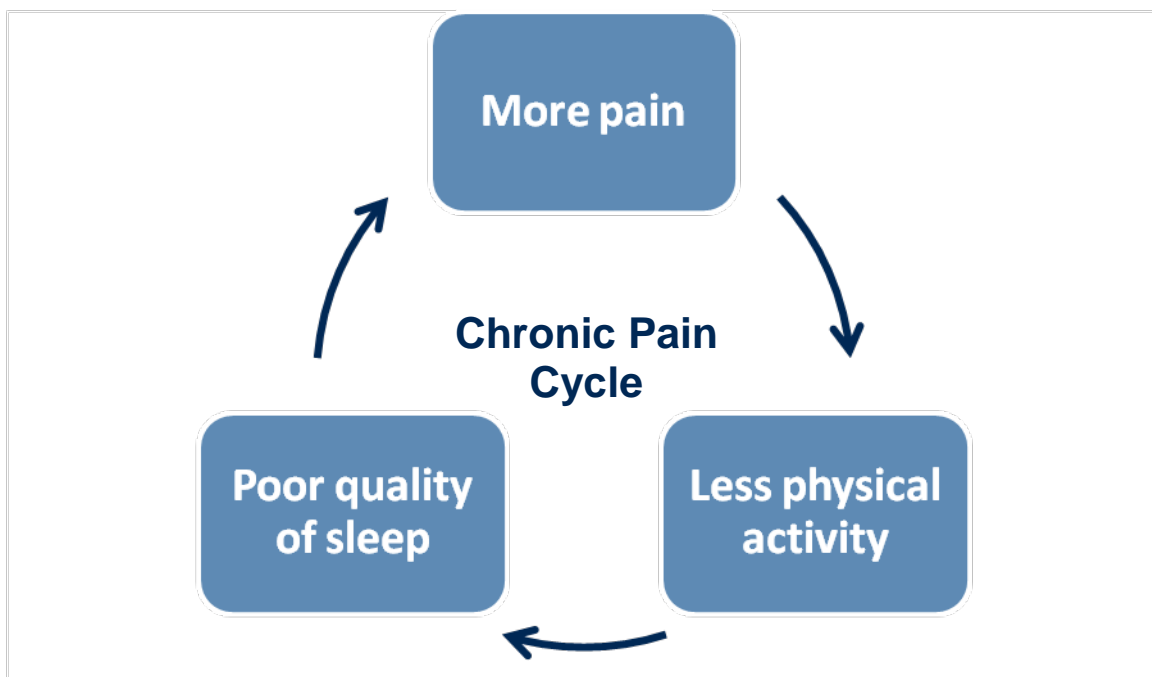
Because they are in pain, they do less physical activity during the day.

With less physical activity they do not get enough high-quality sleep.

Without enough rest, their bodies feel pain more strongly.

Since they feel more pain, they are even less active, which makes their sleep worse and so they feel even more pain.

This is the chronic pain cycle.



How much pain children and teens feel is also affected by stress at home, school, work or during social activities.

## How can children and teens reduce chronic pain?

These 3 steps have proven to be more helpful than medications in decreasing chronic pain in children and teens.

### 1. Increase daily physical activity

Every child and teen needs aerobic physical activity each day. Aerobic activities make the heart beat faster and cause sweating. Choose activities that are fun and involve family or friends. Physiotherapy may also be helpful.

A healthy goal is to be physically active for 60 minutes every day. A child or teen with chronic pain may have to start with 5 to 10 minutes a day and gradually build up to 60 minutes.

### 2. Set up a regular routine with good sleep habits

Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day trains the body to spend more time in the high-quality stage of sleep.

Avoid naps during the day because naps disrupt the normal sleep pattern. If a nap is needed, set an alarm to limit the nap to 20 minutes.

Set up a relaxing bed-time routine and make the bedroom a relaxing space. Before bed, avoid stimulating activities such as watching TV, playing video games or exercise, and stimulating foods such as caffeine.

### 3. Find ways to cope with and reduce stress

Identify any stressful situations and try to avoid them if possible.

Find ways to cope with stress. Examples are relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, yoga and massage.

Counselling may be helpful to deal with stress, anxiety, low mood or mood swings that worsen pain. Cognitive behavioral therapy is often effective. This involves learning to change the thoughts and feelings that affect behaviour.