



ORTHOPAEDIC
& SPINE CENTER
Open MRI Center

How Can a Pain Psychologist Help You Manage Chronic Pain?

Orthopaedic & Spine Center employs a medical Psychologist who treats patients with chronic pain. You may be unfamiliar with how a medical treatment Psychologist affects the healing process, so we've put together the following guide for your convenience.



Role of a Pain Psychologist

Pain is not limited to the physical sensations you feel as a result of a medical complication or damage to your body. Pain is an experience that encompasses many aspects of one's life, and it can manifest physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

Pain can affect your ability to be productive in your everyday life.

Psychological treatment can help you hone specific skills that ease pain and ultimately increase your quality of life.

During evaluations, pain psychologists try to understand your particular situation and your ability to live with pain. There are many methods that will be used to assess how pain affects you.

Pain psychotherapy deals with your physical and emotional issues, and the treatment process includes:

- Psychophysiological techniques including biofeedback, relaxation training, and mindfulness
- Behavioral techniques including self-monitoring and paced progressive increases in activity levels
- Cognitive therapy, which redefines your relationship with pain

One specific and effective type of therapy is called ACT, or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. This is a mindfulness-based behavioral therapy that in many ways is counter-intuitive to typical Western psychology.

In essence, ACT aims to guide the patient to a balanced and meaningful life that includes the acceptance of pain and commitment to one's values. It may sound unorthodox to a Western audience, but the therapy successfully treats OCD, chronic pain, PTSD, MBCPM™ and anxiety.



What is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain lasts three to six months (or possibly more) beyond the expected recovery time from an injury, surgery or musculoskeletal condition. This type of pain can affect basic body motions, interrupt sleep, and cause fatigue. Chronic pain can also lead to alcohol and drug addiction or abuse.

Approximately 10 to 30 percent of Americans

live with some form of chronic pain. Both men and women can experience chronic pain, though women are slightly more susceptible. Middle-aged people are also more likely to suffer from it.

How Can a Pain Psychologist Help?

Pain psychologists offer treatment, clinical work, research, and teaching. They utilize specific techniques to help patients mitigate chronic pain. These techniques include support, education, relaxation, stress management, sleep hygiene, and goal setting.

One such technique is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT. This method focuses on thoughts, feelings, and actions. The goal of the therapy is to have patients think in a more adaptive, non-catastrophic way.

The aforementioned Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is another such treatment.

Another technique is Vocational Assessment, which evaluates a patient's interests, aptitudes, and abilities. This technique is used for those who might need to adjust the way they work or the type of work they do.

Initial Evaluation

During your first evaluation, a psychologist will learn about your pain, gather your psychological history, and determine your current status. They will also get an understanding of how you view your pain and what your expectations are for treatment.

The psychologist will determine your ability to separate yourself from your struggle with pain and, finally, understand what you feel is important, such as your personal values.

Your appointment will last approximately 45 minutes. During this time, a medical psychologist will speak with you about your experience with pain and how this pain affects your daily life.

If you are considering surgery, your insurance company may require you to take part in a psychological evaluation before authorization is granted.

Presurgical Psychological Evaluation

Should you be a candidate for surgery, then you should know what to expect. First, be aware that some insurers require patients to participate in a psychological evaluation if they are under consideration for implantation of spinal cord stimulators and other elective surgeries.

Spinal surgery and implantation procedures are expensive, and psychological factors can affect treatment and patient commitment. Therefore, it is crucial that you undergo a psychological evaluation.



Benefits and Risks

Surgical decisions should not be made lightly, and you should be as informed as possible before deciding on a course of action. This means understanding the risks involved.

Patients in therapy can experience deeply emotional feelings that include anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt, helplessness, loneliness, and sadness, among others. These emotions can come from unpleasant memories or other thoughts recalled during the session.

Experiencing these thoughts and feelings, particularly ones you have avoided in the past, is often a prerequisite to overcoming them and is a key component in the healing process.

The benefits speak for themselves. Approximately 80 percent of patients show significant improvement in their symptoms and quality of life and/or experience high satisfaction with their therapy.

Getting Started

The first step in dealing with your pain is speaking to a pain management physician. Schedule an appointment with your doctor so he or she can determine the root cause of your pain and which treatment is the most effective.

Each person experiences pain differently based on his or her own perception, which leads to different thoughts and emotions regarding to pain.

"I believe that psychological assessment, treatment and support components are an essential part of any comprehensive pain management program. We added these services so that our chronic pain patients would have access to extensive pain management resources to achieve the best outcomes. We also offer adjunct programs, such as group therapy and Mindfulness for Chronic Pain (MBCPM)TM training, which provide additional support and education for our patients and their families."

-Dr. Raj Sureja

Senior Interventional Pain Management Specialist
at OSC



Narcotics Dependence and Addiction

The number of prescriptions written for pain have risen approximately 300 percent in the last decade. Patients sometimes take them when they are not necessary.

Opioids are extremely effective at relieving certain types of pain, but they can be taken in situations in which they don't work properly or are unsafe. And even when they are appropriate, it's important to understand how to take them safely. Your physician will choose the proper type to help you avoid dangerous side effects.

Prescription drugs are not always the solution. Research indicates that alternative treatment methods can help most people with mild to severe chronic pain.

Some patients can become dependent on prescription drugs and are unable to stop taking them even if the pills are detrimental.



About OSC



OSC, located in Newport News, Virginia, is a full-service orthopaedic practice and pain management center with 32 patient exam rooms, three x-ray suites, a Lunar DPX Bone Densitometer Room, an Open 1.2T Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Center, and a Physical Therapy Center on campus. OSC physicians have full staff privileges at Mary Immaculate Hospital and Riverside Regional Medical Center and active clinical staff privileges at Peninsula Surgery Center. Between 8% and 12% of OSC patients have surgery annually, while the rest are treated with conservative approaches. To learn more, visit www.osc-ortho.com.