

Chronic pain relief more likely when psychological science involved

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When it comes to chronic pain, psychological interventions often provide more relief than prescription drugs or surgery without the risk of side effects, but are used much less frequently than traditional medical treatments, according to a comprehensive review published by the American Psychological Association.

"Chronic pain affects 116 million American adults, making it more prevalent than heart disease, diabetes and cancer combined, and traditional medical approaches are inadequate," said Mark P. Jensen, PhD, of the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Washington. Jensen was the scholarly lead for the review, published in the February-March issue of *American Psychologist*, APA's flagship journal. "This review highlights the key role that psychologists have had - and continue to have - in the understanding and effective treatment of [chronic pain](#)."

Articles in the special issue describe how psychology addresses racial and ethnic disparities in the assessment and treatment of chronic pain, [persistent pain](#) in older adults and family influences on children's chronic pain. Also discussed is a range of successful treatment approaches for chronic pain, including cognitive behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, mindfulness and hypnosis. Other articles examine how neurophysiology can help tailor treatments for specific cases and how interdisciplinary [chronic pain management](#) is most likely to lead to effective outcomes when health care teams include psychologists and coordinate services.

"The more we learn, the more the field of [chronic pain treatment](#) recognizes the critical contribution of psychologists," said Jensen. "This may be due to the fact that psychologists' expertise about the brain, behavior and their interaction is at the heart of both the problem of and the solution to chronic pain."

Chronic pain is also among health concerns featured in APA's new Center for Psychology and Health briefing series.

"The series draws upon scientific research to demonstrate psychology's essential role in primary and integrated health care," said APA CEO Norman B. Anderson, PhD, director of the center and editor of American Psychologist. "In addition to providing behavioral assessments and treatment that give people skills to manage [chronic conditions](#), psychologists can conduct assessments that differentiate normal processes from illness and address medication side effects, adjustment reactions or combinations of these."

Provided by American Psychological Association

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