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# SOS Détresse

## Chronic pain

### Chronic pain decreases day-to-day well-being.

Chronic physical pain has an impact on the daily lives of many people: unbearable pain in their joints, chronic back pain, recurrent headaches, post-operative pain, and even tumours. All these types of pain weaken and demoralize those they affect. People in pain sleep poorly, experience a decline in their quality of life and tend to become isolated.

Physical pain is exhausting, but many people don't realize its psychological impact: how it reduces the quality of life, and ensures that people are only able to live a fraction of a "normal life". Many patients are trapped by their pain, condemned to passivity, powerlessness or even isolation.

## Studies in pain

Across a variety of research areas, such as tumour/cancer research, it appears that psychological support may decrease pain and accelerate the healing process.

Scientific studies in the field of pain are now being taken seriously. They have shown that we must consider the subjective suffering of chronic or recurrent pain and that it is beneficial to encourage those concerned to change their attitude towards their suffering, i.e. for the better rather than focusing on the worst.

## A multitude of different colours

Not everyone experiences pain in the same way because it is not perceived objectively. This is always my subjective experience, the individual, which can change depending on the mood, activities or day to day business.

Negative feelings, such as hopelessness and anger, strengthen my pain. Positive feelings such as joy and good humour, help in decreasing the pain sensation.

When I expect to hurt, I actually hurt.

Pain has an important alarm function. Identifying the needs of my body, it can be the harbinger of disease. When I know what goes in my body, I can better influence and I feel less helpless.

I don't feel pain in consistently the same way. To realize the differences, I write down my feelings in a calendar. I note the intensity of pain on a scale from 1 to 10, and the duration of pain. I add comments on my mood, on important events and possible triggers. Taking into account the differences and triggers between different times, I am more able to control my experiences and I feel the pain less than if it were to come on without prior knowledge.

It is very important to realize that I feel pain more intensely when I focus all my attention on it, especially when complaining about what I felt.

Pain creates stress. It is useful to know and give a name to what stresses me out: my work, relationships with colleagues or family members, or being exhausted by caring for a parent. This is often a set of problems that I should probably not take on alone in the future.

## **Persistent pain can tire you and make you passive**

To feel better, it is important to get back into the swing of things little by little. Any physical activity can be beneficial: walking, swimming, dancing, whatever, as long as it thrills me. To be more motivated, I join a group and share activities with people, such as yoga or going to the gym.

There are many methods that do me good. To find what method suits me best, I listen to my inner self, look at what has pleased me in the past and what might cheer me again. I can take up old hobbies or devote myself to new ones. Maybe I'll want to learn a new language or devote myself to attending music concerts, listening to CDs, singing in a choir or learning to play an instrument. Whenever I feel great, I don't feel my pain.

Many of these activities are not possible when one is alone, after years of suffering. Maybe I do not have the courage to meet other people or to contact old friends. Perhaps I lack the motivation to move and be more active. When the pain has such a hold on me, it's time I look for help.

## **Therapeutic aid**

In an interview with a physician or psychotherapist I can openly talk about my pains and their multiple consequences, then receive practical help to better manage in the future. Each change of attitude and behaviour takes time. Many effective techniques must first be learned and exercised regularly before therapeutic result can be expected.

During therapy I learn to give up my way of thinking, that everything is a "disaster scenario", with the understanding that pain is not a "catastrophe" that makes me lose all my means, but rather that I am able to influence it. I train myself to divert my attention from pain and towards positive activities and experiences.

The psychologist supports me in the reorganization of my life, so that I feel better:

- I allow myself to talk about my worries, my feelings of guilt, my anxieties, and

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- express my frustration and anger
- I learn to become aware of my body and better manage my energy, because any overuse reinforces my pain
  - I'm training to use more positive language
  - I learn to take better care of myself, out of my isolation, by taking initiatives and responsibility for my life and my pain
  - And I learned to allow myself to ask for help!

It is wise to take advantage of periods without pain to learn relaxation methods, such as autogenously training or muscle relaxation, according to Jacobson, and practice it regularly. Special breathing techniques (e.g. in the belly breathing) may help find inner calm. These techniques can be learned in courses. My family doctor can also direct me to professionals with expertise in this area.

Sometimes it is necessary to take medication despite all the beneficial techniques learned. I can use medication without bad conscience. It is not appropriate to wait in order to prevent the development of a "pain memory".

## **A call to SOS Distress**

A call to SOS Distress can be the first step out of isolation, never being alone with your pain. In a confidential meeting with volunteers, you have the opportunity to open up and reflect on the next steps to take.