If you’re experiencing pain
Talk to your doctor about how they can help you get relief from your pain. It is usually possible to manage it so you can undertake your daily activities more easily and get on with living your life.

Remember
Talk to your doctor about whether your medications are providing relief, if you’re experiencing any side effects and to what extent you can undertake your daily activities.

Healthy body
Living with pain often means people become less active. However, it is important to stay as active as possible to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In addition to seeing your doctor, the holistic management of nerve pain may involve:

- Occupational therapists
- Diabetic nurse educators
- Physiologists
- Psychologists
- Rehabilitation counsellors

Healthy mind
Relaxation techniques may help you to cope better with your pain. Not all relaxation techniques will work for all people, so talk to your doctor about what may be best for you.

You’re not alone
It is important to see your doctor regularly to monitor your progress and response to treatments. They may help you take better control of your pain.

You should also talk to your family and friends as they can also provide a great support network to help manage your pain.

References:
2. Dominick C et al, NZMJ 2011; 124: 63-75
5. Helping people cope with chronic non-malignant pain. BPJ 2014; 63: 29-38
13. O’Reilly F, Living with pain often means people become less active. However, it is important to stay as active as possible to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In addition to seeing your doctor, the holistic management of nerve pain may involve:

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ARE YOU IN PAIN? HAVE YOU BEEN IN PAIN FOR A LONG TIME? – YOU’RE NOT ALONE

Pain is a very personal experience; it may be short-lived or chronic (long-lasting). When it sticks around for a while we often learn to put up with it. Pain is considered “chronic,” “persistent” or “long lasting” if it continues for more than three months. Chronic pain is surprisingly common and is believed to affect up to one in six New Zealanders.

Pain is subjective; many people who experience chronic pain also experience other symptoms such as poor sleep and depression.

Chronic pain may arise from an initial injury such as a back strain or from a health condition such as osteoarthritis. Chronic pain may limit movement, which can reduce flexibility, strength and stamina. This can make it difficult to carry out important and enjoyable activities.

TREATING LONG-TERM PAIN

Chronic pain may occur in different parts of the body. It’s important you work closely with your healthcare professionals to identify the causes of your pain in order to find the best way to manage it. The following treatments are among some of the ways to manage pain:

**Medications**

**Acupuncture**

**Massage therapy**

SOME EXAMPLES OF CAUSES AND CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH CHRONIC PAIN

JOINT PAIN – OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis occurs most often in the knees, hips and spine. The symptoms of osteoarthritis can vary from one person to the next; one of the most common symptoms is joint pain. The pain has been described as being like a grinding, rubbing or crunching sensation.

Osteoarthritis progresses slowly and develops over many years and is usually diagnosed by symptoms and physical examination of the affected joint or joints.

Causes of osteoarthritis

Many different factors contribute to developing osteoarthritis including:

- Joint injuries (sports, work place)
- Increased age
- Family history
- Being overweight or obese

NEUROPATHIC PAIN (NERVE PAIN)

Neuropathic pain is often described as feeling like burning, freezing, stabbing, shooting or electric shocks. This pain can be constant or may come and go. The pain usually worsens at night causing sleep disturbances.

How is neuropathic pain diagnosed?

Nerve pain needs to be diagnosed by your doctor or other health care professional (HCP). If your doctor/HCP suspects you may have nerve pain, they will ask specific questions about the nature of your pain such as symptoms, intensity, duration and location. Some doctors use special screening questionnaires to help determine if you could have nerve pain. Your doctor/HCP will then perform a physical examination and maybe order special diagnostic tests to determine the nature of your pain.

Your doctor will discuss the most appropriate options for managing your nerve pain with you. If prescribed any medication, taking this properly is an important part of managing your nerve pain. There are additional things you can do to help improve the likelihood of your treatment being successful.

TYPES OF NEUROPATHIC PAIN

Sciatica

Sciatica is a group of symptoms, rather than an actual disease. It is named after the sciatic nerve – a large nerve that starts at the spinal cord in the lower back and travels to the lower limbs. Sciatica occurs when pressure is put on this nerve. As a result, people with sciatica commonly experience pain in their lower back that travels through the buttock, downward into their legs, feet and toes.

What does sciatica feel like?

The pain associated with sciatica often feels like a sharp pain or a burning sensation. Pain usually starts in the lower back and continues down one leg, following the path of the sciatic nerve. Sciatica usually affects only one side of the body. The pain in the leg can feel worse than the pain felt in the lower back and may worsen with coughing. Sciatica may result in other symptoms such as muscle weakness, impaired reflexes, numbness or pins and needles.

What causes sciatica?

Sciatica involves damage to nerves (“neuropathic” or nerve pain). This is most commonly the result of a herniated disc (sometimes called a slipped disc).

DIABETIC PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY

Diabetic peripheral neuropathy is one of the most common long-term complications of diabetes. Peripheral neuropathy refers to nerve damage in the peripheral nervous system, which are the nerves outside of the brain or spinal cord. Diabetic peripheral neuropathy (DPN) refers to damage that can occur to nerves as a complication of diabetes.

It isn’t exactly known how diabetes causes damage to nerves, but it is believed to be the result of high blood sugar (called “hyperglycaemia”). Research suggests that lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption may also contribute to nerve damage.

It is difficult to know exactly how many people have neuropathies, however it is estimated to affect up to 50% of people living with type 2 diabetes and 10 – 20% of these will experience troublesome symptoms requiring treatment.

Discs occupy the space between vertebrae in the spine; over time these discs can become damaged with general wear and tear. If a disc protrudes from the spine and puts pressure on the sciatic nerve, it can cause the symptoms associated with sciatica.

Many different factors contribute to developing osteoarthritis including:

- Joint injuries (sports, work place)
- Increased age
- Family history
- Being overweight or obese