

# Multimodal Treatment of Chronic Pain



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## KEYWORDS

- Multimodal • Combination therapy • Chronic pain treatment
- Multidisciplinary chronic pain treatment • Interdisciplinary pain treatment

## KEY POINTS

- Most patients with chronic pain receive multimodal treatment.
- Combination pharmacotherapy should be carefully selected to avoid additive side effects and drugs with similar mechanisms of action or other interactions while still providing benefit.
- Structured interdisciplinary programs that include psychological treatments, rehabilitation, and medical management are beneficial yet costly, and may be applicable to only a minority of patients.
- Interventions including surgery and injections should rarely be first-line treatments and should be combined with other domains—rehabilitation, pharmacotherapy, attention to mental health, and coping.
- Complementary and alternative medicine as an addition to conventional pain treatment is a safe yet largely understudied area.

## INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain of all sorts is not only responsible for considerable personal suffering worldwide, it also contributes to substantial costs to society. Although suffering cannot be quantified, the economic burden of pain in the United States alone is estimated at \$650 billion per year in health care and lost productivity.<sup>1</sup> Although there are many treatment options available, none are universally endorsed, and many come with counterproductive side effects, or in the case of interventions, may lead to further complications.

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The authors have nothing to disclose.

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When treating chronic pain, a common goal is to provide a lasting and meaningful reduction in suffering with concomitant improvements in overall functioning and health-related quality of life. Additional considerations are to minimize side effects and adverse events, and to deliver the care in a cost-effective manner. Ongoing pain is multidimensional with physical, cognitive, psychological, and behavioral aspects. Given the complex nature of chronic pain and the goals for treating it, it is not surprising that any 1 treatment by itself is rarely adequate to achieve these objectives. Rather, chronic pain lends itself to a multimodal treatment approach (Fig. 1). Treatment often includes medication(s), physical rehabilitation, lifestyle changes, psychology, advanced pain interventions, surgery, and complementary and alternative medicine in various combinations. Combination, multimodal therapy can be on an ad hoc basis, come about as an evolution in patient care owing to partial or incomplete treatment response, or take place in a more formalized setting such as a structured rehabilitation program. Although combination therapy is commonplace in clinical practice, such approaches are very little studied. In this article, we review multimodal, combination therapy for chronic pain.

### PHARMACOLOGIC TREATMENT

With ongoing chronic pain, it is unusual for a single medication to result in satisfactory pain relief in a unimodal, stand-alone fashion. Therefore, combination pharmacologic treatment is an important aspect of multimodal chronic pain management. A key component of treating pain with medications is finding the balance between effective treatment and acceptable side effects (Fig. 2).

“Effective treatment” is difficult to define, because it will almost never mean a complete remission of pain. An analysis from a collection of industry-sponsored chronic pain trials suggest that a reduction of pain by 30% is clinically meaningful, because it is at this level that patient ratings demonstrate a “much improved” pain experience.<sup>2</sup>

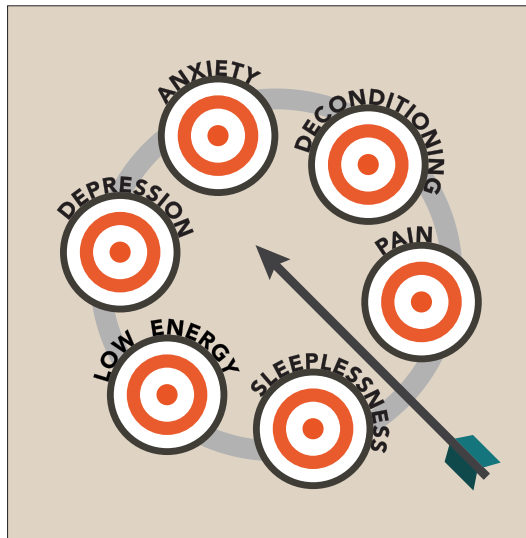


Fig. 1. Many targets need more than 1 arrow.

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