

For: The People's Friend magazine

Help For Stubborn Pain

Our Health Writer, Colleen Shannon, learns what's on offer at a pain clinic.

Living with pain every day can be incredibly lonely, especially if the cause isn't obvious to other people.

The truth is, if you have long-lasting (chronic) pain, you're not alone because it affects up to half of people in the UK. The problem is even more widespread among people past the age of 75.

Not everyone has severe pain and some people find it manageable. But if the pain is getting you down and affecting your everyday life, the right kind of help from health professionals can make all the difference.

To find out more about chronic pain, and what can be done, I asked Dr Stephen Humble. He is a Consultant in Interventional Spinal Medicine and Pain Management, Medical Director of the London Interventional Clinic, and a representative for the British Pain Society.

He explained that there are many causes of chronic pain. Some of the most common include arthritis, serious injuries, major surgery, bad posture and lack of exercise. Spinal pain is also very common.

Chronic pain can affect your life in so many ways. It might mean you're less able to work, socialise or enjoy family life. Fatigue and poor sleep take a toll. And people with chronic pain can become stressed, anxious and low (according to the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence, half of people with chronic pain also have a diagnosis of depression).

Because it hurts, you may be less likely to exercise and stay active. Not only does this make it easier to become overweight, it can start a vicious circle where lower activity levels lead to weakness, stiffness, and more pain.

If this is happening to you, a pain management clinic (also called a pain management programme) might be the answer.

Pain management clinics look at the whole person, not just one symptom. There's usually a specialist team of doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, psychologists and other health professionals. They work together, applying their different areas of expertise to design a programme that's tailored to your needs.

Many times, the best solution is to combine various treatments, which might include injections, medications, physical exercises and rehabilitation, and psychological techniques to train your brain.

It may not take the pain away completely but there's good evidence that this holistic

approach helps people cope and enjoy a better life.

To get this service on the NHS, you'll need a referral from your GP. You may need to go through a further assessment before you're put on the programme and the process can take a lot of time. Some people decide to go private.

Whichever route you take, if pain is getting in the way of your life, I hope you will explore the options and find out what's available to you.

You can also learn more by visiting the British Pain Society website at www.britishpainsociety.org/people-with-pain/ , where you will find lots of valuable information.