

1. Chronic pain: Does it mean you cannot improve?

Javier, 47, had spent most of his life lifting heavy materials at construction sites. One morning, after carrying a stack of tiles, a sharp pain shot through his lower back. The doctor said it was probably a muscle strain. Months later, the wound had healed, but the pain still came and went without warning.

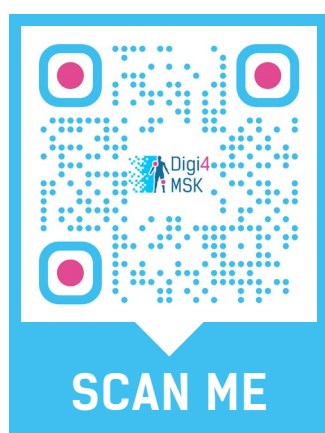
To understand what was happening, Javier had an MRI. The report mentioned “*some disc degeneration and a small disc bulge*,” but the specialist explained that many people his age showed the same and had no pain at all. The result only left him more confused.

He began to avoid anything that might make things worse. He quit his job, stopped walking the dog, and even turning in bed made him anxious. “*If it hurts, something must still be damaged*,” he told himself. Some days the pain flared after stress or sleepless nights; other times it eased for no reason.

Friends said to rest more, others told him to stretch, and online advice only made it harder to know what to believe. The worst part was not the ache itself but the feeling of being trapped in it—with no clear cause and no clear way out.

When his physiotherapist later mentioned that long-lasting pain could act differently from a fresh injury, Javier felt both sceptical and curious. *Could pain really change even after years?*

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Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding what chronic pain means and how it differs from pain after an injury.
- Recognizing common scan findings that do not always explain pain.
- Becoming aware of everyday factors—stress, rest, and activity—that can influence pain over time.

YouTube link: https://youtu.be/lfbK36_IDe0

1.1. What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts for more than three months. This label implies that the pain is a little more complex than short-term pain caused by an acute injury.

1.2. Why does chronic pain persist?

Science tells us that pain is not just about damage to a body part. Lifestyle choices, activity, sleep quality and other factors such as beliefs, experiences and habits can all make pain feel worse.

Changes can occur in the body's protective systems such as the nervous system, which explains why some people feel pain even when scans and blood tests are completely normal. **This means they may continue to experience pain without injury.** It is like an alarm system that is stuck in the "on" position, even if there is no actual danger.



1.3. What can be done?

The good news is that **chronic pain can be managed**. Just because it has been there for a while does not mean that nothing can be done. Here are some strategies:

- **Movement & Exercise.** Light physical activity might relieve some of your pain. Gradually increase your activity levels over time. Remember, it may be ok to move even if you have moderate pain!
- **Better Sleep & Stress Management.** Good sleep can reduce your pain levels, and methods such as meditation or breathing exercises can help reduce stress.
- **Professional help.** Things associated with a healthy lifestyle (such as sleep, exercise, working, social life, regular diet...) are also likely to help - but most of the time it is not the same thing that helps everyone, so it is important that you find out what helps you. A health professional can be one way to get support in finding out how you can learn to self-manage.

Takeaway messages:

Chronic pain means the pain has been there for a while, but with the right management plan, its negative effects can be reduced. If you or someone you know is dealing with chronic pain, know that there are steps you can take.