



## 5 things to know about Chronic Pain

### 1. Chronic pain is different than acute pain. School attendance is essential.

- *Chronic pain is pain that lasts for at least 3 months and often occurs because of changes in my nervous system. Chronic pain is generally unhelpful pain (i.e., unlike acute pain, chronic pain does not signal that I need to rest or that I have an acute injury that needs to heal). Sometimes people know what causes their chronic pain (e.g., arthritis) and sometimes people don't know why they have pain (e.g., occurs out of the blue, or remains even after a sports injury has healed). If I sit at home and rest all day because of my chronic pain, THIS MAKES IT WORSE!*
- *I am learning that I need to exercise (with pacing), get good sleep, see friends, and come to school (with management strategies) in order to manage my chronic pain. Doctors have told me that when young people with chronic pain engage in their life (and don't avoid activities) they generally experience less pain.*
- *My doctors tell me that **being at school is essential for my treatment**. I might need modifications and accommodations (e.g., stretch breaks, opportunities to do my deep breathing) but please try to help me get to school and stay at school, even when I'm in lots of pain. (Thank you!)*

### 2. Help me modify, not avoid activity

- *I am learning independent ways to manage my pain.*
- *Sitting on the sidelines in gym class makes me feel left out and hurts my self-esteem (not to mention, it also places focus on my pain). Please involve me in ways that I can (e.g., helping score, participating while allowing me to take breaks, setting up a plan with me to be included).*
- *The more I avoid things, the worse my anxiety gets (e.g., avoiding school makes me anxious about the work I missed and peers wondering where I am – this in turn makes it even harder to get back to school if I have been away for weeks).*



Dear Teacher,  
Thank you for your help and support. Thank you for taking the time to learn about chronic pain. My doctors tell me that I can't get better without you.  
Sincerely,  
Your very grateful student



### 3. Please Validate and believe me when I say my pain is real.

- *Many of my doctors, friends, and adults in my life have questioned whether I am making the pain up. I have been told “it’s all in your head”, “you are faking it” (because some days I can do more than others), and “your pain isn’t real.” This makes me feel sad and not believed, which ultimately leads to more pain.*
- *It’s hard to have a condition that people cannot physically see (e.g., unlike being in a wheelchair).*
- *I’m not making my pain up. My pain is still be real even if doctors cannot find a specific medical cause for my pain.*
- *Please tell me that you believe my pain is real. Please tell me that you don’t pretend to understand what it’s like for me. Please tell me that you want to support me and help me to succeed.*
- *Please validate before pushing for change (e.g., say to me ‘I can see that this is challenging for you and I still expect you to complete some part of the math assignment’).*



### 4. Please don’t focus on my chronic pain

- *Doctors tell me that my pain LOVES attention and that attention to chronic pain can actually make it worse/be reinforcing of pain.*
- *Please don’t ask me about my pain or ask me to rate my pain. When this occurs, I become focused on my pain and think about it.*
- *Instead, please ask me about something fun that happened over my weekend so I can focus on the good in my life and you can reinforce function/’normal’ activities.*



### 5. Allow me to use my proactive strategies

- *I am learning ways to “get the pain before it gets me.” My doctors tell me to take breaks every 30 minutes to stretch (even if I’m not in pain) and to use my relaxation exercises 3 times a day. They say that it is way easier to manage pain proactively than to wait until it gets really bad and then use all my strategies.*
- *Therefore, when you see me standing in class or asking to go to the washroom so I can have a walk, please know that I’m okay! I’m doing what works for me to manage.*

