



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Chronic Illness and Pain Support Groups

These groups bring together people living with ongoing health conditions that affect daily life: autoimmune diseases, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, neuropathic and other chronic pain, IBD, diabetes, heart disease, and more. What they share is persistence, unpredictability, and an often invisible nature that creates isolation. They come in two forms. Peer support groups offer community and practical coping knowledge. Clinician-led groups apply structured CBT or ACT for the depression, anxiety, fear-avoidance, and functional impairment that often accompany chronic pain and illness.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A fit for anyone who wants connection with others who understand the experience firsthand.
- Clinical pain groups suit those whose pain impairs function and who are ready for behavioral work.
- Not a substitute for medical care. Pursue alongside, not instead of, treatment.

What it's for

People at any stage, from newly diagnosed to managing a condition for decades.

Condition-specific groups allow focused talk on treatment and medication.

Open groups welcome anyone living with chronic illness or pain.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Peer groups meet weekly or biweekly for 60 to 90 minutes, open discussion.

2 Online groups and forums offer continuous access when leaving home is hard.

3 Clinical pain groups run 8 to 12 weeks: pacing, sleep, catastrophizing, relapse prevention.

Both peer and clinical formats are well-supported.

- A review of 31 reviews found peer support **improves self-management, quality of life, and wellbeing** across chronic conditions.¹
- A Cochrane review of 75 trials found CBT produced **small to moderate gains in pain, disability, catastrophizing, and mood**.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

"You don't look sick" stops here. No one needs your pain explained or proven.

Borrow what works. Practical coping knowledge is one of peer support's real gifts.

Pair it with care. Groups support, but don't replace, your medical management.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is this peer support or a clinician-led pain management group?
- 2** Is it specific to my condition, or open to anyone with chronic illness or pain?
- 3** Are online or forum options available for harder days?

Ready to find a group?

Browse 2,000+ therapy and support groups in all 50 states.

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Chronic Illness and Pain Support Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Thompson, D. M., Booth, L., Moore, D., & Mathers, J. Peer support for people with chronic conditions: a systematic review of reviews. *BMC Health Services Research* (2022), 22(1), Article 427.
- 2 Williams, A. C. de C., Fisher, E., Hearn, L., & Eccleston, C. Psychological therapies for the management of chronic pain (excluding headache) in adults. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* (2021), Article CD007407.

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