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Chronic Pain and the Family: A New Guide (The Harvard University Press Family Health Guides)

Julie K. Silver M.D.

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Chronic pain is the leading cause of disability in the United States, affecting as many as 48 million people in this country alone. It can demoralize and depress both patient and family, especially when there is no effective pain control and no hope for relief. Improperly managed, chronic pain can lead to substance abuse (usually painkillers) and to acute psychological and emotional distress. Pain begets stress and stress begets pain in a wretched downward spiral.

Silver reviews the causes and characteristics of chronic pain and explores its impact on individual family relationships and on the extended family, covering such issues as employment, parenting, childbearing and inheritance, and emotional health. Silver treats aspects of chronic pain not covered in a typical office visit: how men and women differ in their experience of chronic pain, the effect of chronic pain on a toddler's behavior or an older child's performance in school, the risks of dependence on and addiction to pain medications, and practical ways for relatives beyond the immediate family circle to offer help and support to the person in pain.

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