

## **What is Chronic Pain?**

**Narrator:** Most pain is temporary and manageable, but chronic pain is different. And because it is different, we need to think about it in very different ways.

**Ed Covington, M.D.:** In the overwhelming majority of cases acute pain can be linked to some specific occurrence; there's an inflamed appendix, there's an inflamed joint, there's a broken bone. With chronic pain there may be no apparent physical injury or illness to explain it. The physician and the patient are accustomed to deal with acute pain and both naturally expect that some cause will be found, and when it's found, it can be fixed and at that point the pain will go away. Part of the problem with chronic pain is that when we start looking for an explanation it's not so much that we're looking in the wrong place, but we may be looking in the wrong time. And what I mean by that is that the presence of a severe pain problem which exists for some period of time can actually change the nervous system so that the peripheral nerves are changed, after a period of time the spinal cord has changed, after a period of time there are even changes in various levels of the brain. So that to explain a person's pain one day it may be necessary to look at an illness that actually went away several years earlier.

**Narrator:** We don't know everything that there is to know about chronic pain, but here's what we do know:

- Chronic Pain is any pain that continues beyond the expected period of healing for an illness or injury.
- You can experience pain even if you are no longer ill or if your injuries have healed.
- In fact, many persons experience pain even in the absence of an apparent cause.
- But chronic pain has a physiological or neurological basis even when we don't know what it is.
- Chronic pain is real.