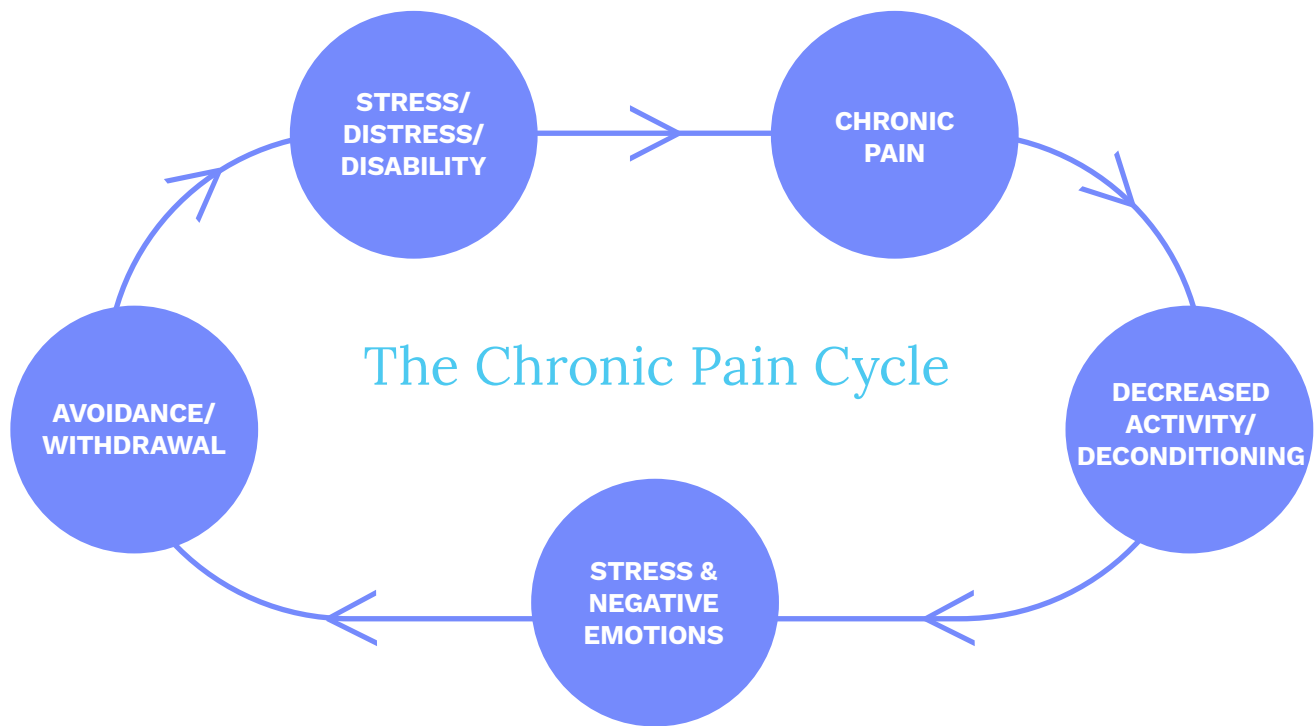




Since chronic pain impacts various aspects of daily functioning and areas of life, the chronic pain cycle is helpful in understanding the process and stages that occur over time.

When we become stressed, our muscles become tight, particularly in our back, neck, and shoulders. Over time, the chronically tense muscles can ache and spasm causing pain.

As the figure above illustrates, the onset of chronic pain often leads to a decrease in activities, which can lead to physical deconditioning such as muscle wasting and tightening. Stress can contribute to chronic pain and also exacerbate negative thoughts (“I can’t do anything when I have pain like this”) and difficult emotions such as frustration and depression. These factors contribute to increased avoidance of family and friends, and anything that involves movement since it hurts to move. This combination means more distress and disability, leading to increased pain.