

# THE IMMEASURABLE TOLL OF CHRONIC PAIN

ONE IN FIVE CANADIANS AFFLICTED WITH IT, WRITES DR. NADIA ALAM



DR. NADIA ALAM  
Column

You step on a Lego piece and yank your foot back. Your hand strays near a hot stove and you pull away.

Pain is a dynamic event linking space, sensation and time with emotion, behaviour, memory and hormone production through complex pathways in the body — all integrated into a powerful experience.

Most of the time, pain is temporary, a warning that something has caused or may imminently cause damage to our body.

But in some, the pain persists even when the painful trigger is gone. Pain persisting beyond three months is defined as chronic pain. The pain sensing, processing and modulating pathways become distorted, and pain becomes an illness in its own right.

All the science aside, having chronic pain is a significant burden.

One-in-five Canadians lives with pain as a daily part of their lives. It carries a huge economic toll, consuming 10 per cent of the health-care budget by itself.

More than that is the suffering associated with chronic pain.

The Canadian Pain Task Force Report states,

"Chronic pain is largely invisible, and those affected often feel disbelieved and stigmatized."

And they're right. There is no lab test or X-ray that shows chronic pain. All there is to go on is the patient's story.

And patient stories vary — the same trigger, a broken bone, in some will resolve completely and in others will evolve into unbearable pain.

Some people will writhe and weep from pain while others will appear calm and collected.

Some people will be unable to sleep, work or function. It is an unpredictable illness.

And although management exists — medications, physical and cognitive therapies — it doesn't work for everyone, and it doesn't work to the same degree in everyone.

Living with chronic pain is a constant struggle to find an explanation for the pain, to navigate a skeptical health-care system, to feel valued and to rebuild one's identity and take back control over their future.

Acknowledging and bearing witness to this struggle by refusing to abandon the person living with chronic pain thus becomes one of the most compassionate acts we can perform.

*Nadia Alam is a Halton physician and past president of the Ontario Medical Association. Her columns also appear on [www.drnadialam.com](http://www.drnadialam.com). She can be reached through her website.*

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Dave Skinner photo

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## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS FOR INVESTING

Most investment categories had disappointing returns during the first quarter of this year.

First a few details. We looked at seven different sectors. Four different stock markets, a global real estate index and two bond indexes. Six categories had declining values in the range of five to eight per cent.

The Canadian stock market, as measured by the S&P/TSX composite index, was the only index that posted a gain. It increased in value close to four per cent.

The question is what can we learn from these results?

In my opinion, they should not change the direction of our investing.

Investor expectations play a major role in how people react to short-term events and make changes



PETER WATSON  
Column

with their long-term investment plans accordingly. This often leads to disappointing results.

For the 10 years ending March 31, the average annual return of the Canadian stock index was nine per cent.

The return of the US stock market index was just under 17 per cent. International developed market stocks index was just slightly lower than the return posted in Canada.

Canada's recent stock market success was largely fuelled by the energy sec-

tor. That was facing pressure for environmental reasons. Then suddenly, because of the war in Ukraine, energy prices soared.

We encourage you to take a long-term approach to investing and manage your expectations accordingly.

*Peter Watson is registered with Aligned Capital Partners Inc. (ACPI) to provide investment advice. Investment products are provided by ACPI. ACPI is a member of the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of ACPI. Watson provides wealth management services through Watson Investments. He can be reached at [www.watsoninvestments.com](http://www.watsoninvestments.com).*

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