

CHRONIC PAIN & SUICIDE RISK

Understanding the Connection. Reducing the Risk.

About 20% of people with chronic pain experience suicidal thoughts, and 5–15% have attempted suicide.

Pain affects more than the body—it impacts mood, sleep, identity, and quality of life. Chronic pain increases the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Safe and comprehensive pain management can help reduce this risk.

RISK FACTORS THAT INCREASE SUICIDE RISK

- Persistent, unrelieved pain and functional limitation
- Mental health conditions (depression, anxiety, PTSD)
- Substance use disorders
- Sleep disturbances and fatigue
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, or being a burden
- Opioid misuse or abrupt discontinuation

PROTECTIVE FACTORS & EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

- Multidisciplinary pain care (medical, psychological, physical therapy)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Treatment of behavioral health and sleep disorders
- Strong social support systems and connectedness
- Safety planning with and reduced access to lethal means during high-risk periods

WARNING SIGNS – WHEN TO ACT NOW

- Talking about wanting to die, escape pain, or having no reason to live
- Expressing hopelessness about the future or unbearable suffering
- Withdrawal from care, friends, family, or activities
- Dramatic mood changes or increased agitation
- Giving away possessions or saying goodbye

HELP & SUPPORT

Local Crisis Line: UPMC Mobile Crisis – 814-889-2141 (Option 1)

National: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988)

Emergency: Call 911

Talk to your healthcare provider about a safety plan.