



# Pain Management Program for People With HIV

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A tailored behavioral approach known as Skills to Manage Pain, or STOMP, may help relieve chronic pain and improve daily functioning for people living with HIV, according to a recent study. Research suggests that a majority of people with HIV experience persistent pain, which can lead to disability, decreased quality of life and difficulty adhering to antiretroviral treatment.

Katie Fitzgerald Jones, PhD, of the New England Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center, and colleagues enrolled 278 HIV-positive adults who had experienced chronic pain for at least three months. At the start of the study, 78% had pain at multiple sites, and nearly a quarter reported long-term opioid use. They were randomly assigned to participate in the STOMP intervention—which involves six one-on-one skills-building sessions with trained social workers alternating with six peer group sessions—or enhanced usual care. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the intervention switched to a remote telephone format eight months into the three-year study.

On average, STOMP participants attended less than half of the sessions, and about a quarter attended none at all. Nevertheless, this group saw a significantly greater reduction in pain immediately after the intervention and three months later, compared with the usual care group. The STOMP group reported more improvement in both pain severity and functional impairment as well as general activity, depression, feelings of self-efficacy and enjoyment of life.

“STOMP is the first peer-involved pain self-management intervention to our knowledge that produced a clinically meaningful result,” the researchers concluded. “STOMP has the potential to improve the lives of people with HIV with chronic pain.”