

What you Should Know about Pain Management

There are many different causes and kinds of pain. Pain can be caused by injury, illness, sickness, disease, or surgery. Your doctor, nurse and other caregivers will help you treat your pain. You can help them by asking questions and finding out more about how to relieve your pain. This handout has some questions and answers to help you do that.

Talk About Your Pain

Is it important for doctors and nurses to ask about your pain?

Yes. This is because pain changes over time or your pain medicine may not be working. Doctors and nurses should ask about your pain regularly.

What do you need to tell your doctor and nurse about your pain?

First, tell them that you have pain, even if they don't ask. Your doctor or nurse may ask you to describe how bad your pain is on a scale of 0 (zero) to 10 with 10 being the worst pain. They may use other pain scales that use words, colors, faces, or pictures. Tell them where and when it hurts. Tell them if you can't sleep or do things like dressing or climbing stairs because of pain. The more they know about your pain the better they can treat it. The words in the list below can be used to describe your pain.

- aching
- bloating
- burning
- cramping
- comes and goes
- constant
- cutting
- dull
- numbing
- pressing
- pressure
- pulling
- radiating
- searing
- sharp
- shooting
- soreness
- stabbing
- throbbing
- tightness

Managing Your Pain

What can be done to treat pain?

There are many ways to manage your pain. There are medicines that can be helpful. There are also other ways to treat pain. Your doctor will work with you to find out what works best for you.

What are the side effects of pain medicines?

It depends on the medicine. Side effects can include constipation, nausea, vomiting, itching, and sleepiness. Refer to *Health Facts for You #4922* for more information.

Are there other ways to relieve pain?

That will depend on your illness or condition and how much pain you have. Some other treatments for pain are listed here.

- Acupuncture, which uses small needles to block pain
- Taking your mind off the pain with movies, games, and talking with others
- Electrical nerve stimulation, which uses small jolts of electricity to block pain
- Physical therapy
- Hypnosis
- Massage
- Exercise
- Heat or cold
- Relaxation

Refer to *Health Facts for You # 4448* for more detail on other methods of pain relief.

Are you afraid to take a pain medicine?

You may have had a bad experience taking pain medicine in the past. Perhaps you had to deal with a side effect or a bad reaction.

Or you may be taking a lot of other medicines. Your doctor or nurse should be able to ease your fears.

Are you afraid that you'll become addicted to pain medicine?

This is a common concern of patients. Studies show that it is unlikely. This is especially true if the patient has never been addicted. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your fears.

Are you afraid that your pain medicine won't work if you take it for a long time?

This is called "tolerance." It means that after a while your body gets used to the medicine and you need to make a change to get pain relief. It is also possible that the cause of your pain is getting worse or you have a new type of pain. You may need more or a different kind of medicine to control your pain. Tell your doctor or nurse about your fears.

Neuropathic Pain

When nerves are hurt or do not work the way they should, they can cause "neuropathic" pain. Neuropathic pain is often described as intense, burning, tingling, shooting, or feeling like electric shocks. The pain can be constant or it can come and go. Some people may have numbness, tingling, and pricking feelings, sensitive to touch, or muscle weakness. Sometimes, something as simple as a light touch, cold, or even taking a shower can result in severe pain. If you are having this kind of pain, please speak with your Health Care provider to find a treatment.

Coping with Your Chronic Pain

Unlike acute pain, where pain only lasts a short time, chronic pain may last for years. Chronic pain often has many causes that can change over time. These can include:

- Changes in the nervous system.
- Lifestyle factors such as smoking, lack of exercise, poor diet, or stress.
- Environmental factors.

No matter what the cause is, chronic pain is real. It does not go away. It can lead to a loss of physical activity and sleep. You may have doubts about the future and feel helpless. Learning to manage pain is important to your health and well-being. Despite the reason for your pain, you can change some aspects of the problems pain can cause by learning to manage it.

Use a "Multimodal" Approach

There are no simple and easy ways to manage chronic pain. But, this doesn't mean we give up. There are many options and ways to combine treatments to reduce your pain and take back control of your life. Each person needs a plan that includes both drug and non-drug methods. Just as pain is rarely controlled with non-drug methods alone, pain cannot be managed with drugs alone. It may take many trials to find the best approach for you.

Refer to *Health Facts for You* #5298 if you have chronic pain.

Website - www.jointcommission.org

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