

## **PAIN MANAGEMENT: WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW**

This information about pain management describes:

- Facts about pain management.
- Suggestions about how to get the best pain control.

### **What do I need to know about pain and pain management?**

Pain can be caused by illness, surgery, procedures, some treatments, and many other causes. Each individual's experience of pain is unique and can be affected by many things. Sometimes pain is just a small nuisance, at other times pain can affect your ability to sleep, eat, and be active. Pain can also make you feel afraid or depressed.

✓ **Pain is not to be expected and accepted as an inevitable part of your hospital stay.**

✓ **Do not hesitate to report your pain to your doctor or nurse.**

✓ **Pain does not necessarily indicate that your illness is worsening.**

Pain management is an important part of your care in the hospital. Relieving and controlling your pain can help you get well faster and enjoy greater comfort during your recovery.

### **Pain can be controlled.**

Although pain is a common experience after surgery and with many types of illness, **most** patients with pain can be kept comfortable with simple treatment.

### **Only the person with pain knows how much pain there is.**

There are no tests, scans, or physical changes that can measure how much pain a person is having. That is why it is important to tell your nurses and doctors about the pain.

### **The pain medicine will not stop working.**

Sometimes, when a person takes a pain medication over a long period of time, the dose of medication that controlled the pain in the past does not provide adequate pain relief. Larger or more frequent doses of the medicine may be needed to obtain the same effect. This is called *tolerance*.

Sometimes the need for a larger dose of the medicine means that pain is increasing. If pain increases, the dose of the medicine can safely be raised. There is no limit to the amount of a narcotic (opioid) that can safely be prescribed as long as there is still unrelieved pain and no side effects.

It is important to understand that the dose of an opioid may need to be increased to relieve pain or to overcome tolerance. It does not mean that a person is "addicted" to the medicine.

### **The right drug and the right amount are more important than the way it is taken.**

Intramuscular injections or "shots" are **not** more effective in relieving pain than many other methods. Although there are a variety of ways to take pain medicine, the pill form ("by mouth") is actually the best method for most pain. Discuss with your doctor or nurse which methods are the best choices for your particular situation.

**Opioid side effects can be managed.**

All drugs have potential side effects but not everyone who takes a medicine will experience the side effects. Some of the more common side effects of narcotics (opioids) are drowsiness, constipation, and nausea. Side effects from opioids can usually be managed successfully. It is important to tell your doctor and nurses about side effects.

**It is very rare to become addicted to medicine taken for pain.**

**Addiction** means that a person is taking a medicine to satisfy emotional or psychological needs rather than for medical reasons. Addiction is often confused with “physical dependence.”

**Physical dependence** occurs after you have been using a narcotic for prolonged periods of time (more than two weeks). Physical dependence is a chemical change your body undergoes which causes withdrawal symptoms if the medicine is abruptly stopped. This is a normal response and can be avoided by gradually reducing the medicine over several days. Physical dependence **is not** addiction.

<b>HOW TO GET THE BEST PAIN CONTROL</b>
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It is important that you become actively involved with your doctors and nurses to plan your pain control. You may want to write down your questions before you meet with them. Be sure to talk to your doctors and nurses about the following:

**Ask your doctors or nurses what to expect.**

Will there be much pain with your illness, treatment, or after your surgery? Where will the pain occur?

**Discuss your pain control options with your doctors and nurses.**

Talk with them about:

- ✓The pain control methods that either worked well or not so well in the past.
- ✓The concerns or fears you may have about pain medicine.
- ✓The allergies to medicines that you may have.
- ✓The side effects that may occur with pain medicines.
- ✓The medicines you take for other health problems. This information is important because mixing some medicines can cause problems.

**Help the doctors and nurses “measure” your pain.**

Use a pain-rating scale to describe how much pain you have. This will make it possible for you to help the doctors and nurses understand how much you are hurting. For example, on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no pain, and 10 being the worst pain you can imagine, how much pain do you have right now?

Tell your doctors and nurses where your pain is, what it feels like, if it changes, and if you feel the pain all the time or only at certain times.

Talk to your doctors and nurses about setting a pain control goal (such as having no pain that is worse than 2 on the scale).

**Take or ask for pain medicine when pain first begins.**

It is easier to control pain if it is not allowed to become severe before medicine is taken. Take pain medicine before performing activities that worsen your pain.

**Talk about the schedule for pain medicines in the hospital and at home.**

You may get pain medicine at set times or you may need to call the nurse to ask for them. It is important that you understand what schedule is best for your type of pain.

**Important tips on how to use pain medicine.**

- ✓When pain is constant, take your medicine on a regular schedule (by the clock). Taking medicine regularly will keep the pain under control. Do not skip a dose of medicine or wait for the pain to get worse before taking your medicine. The exception for this would be if you have **no** pain or severe side effects.
- ✓Ask your doctor or nurse how and when to take extra medicine. If some activities make your pain worse, you may need to take extra doses of pain medicines. The goal is to prevent pain. Once you feel the pain, it is harder to get under control.
- ✓Report all side effects to your doctor and nurse. Some side effects can be treated, at other times side effects may require a change in medicine.

**Non-drug measures to relieve pain.**

There are many methods in addition to medicine that can be used to reduce pain. These methods can be effective for mild to moderate pain and to boost the pain relief effects of drugs. You may need the help of health professionals to learn to do these for yourself. Friends or family members can help with some of them.

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| Relaxation techniques                        | Hot or cold packs |
| Touch  | Massage           |
| Pressure or vibration                        | Hypnosis          |
| Music therapy                                | Distraction       |
| Imagery                                      | Biofeedback       |
| Transcutaneous electrical stimulation (TENS) | Exercises         |
| Ultrasound                                   | Acupuncture       |
| Acupressure                                  |                   |

Resources:

McCaffery, M. & Pasero, C. (1999). Pain Control Manual. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Mosby, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri.

For more information on this subject or other health concerns  
please call Meriter’s Community Resource Library at  
(608) 267-4410 or visit our website at [www.meriter.com](http://www.meriter.com).