

Pain

When pain comes along with an injury or a new medical problem, it is a warning sign that makes you pay attention to what is wrong, and to try to fix it. This is called *acute pain*, and it either stops quickly or will usually stop as soon the illness or injury is healed.

When the pain is very bad, it usually leads us to get medical help. Some of the things that can cause acute pain are surgery, an infection, broken bones, burns, cuts, and dental problems.

But when pain continues without stopping, or comes and goes for a long time, it is no longer a warning sign. It becomes **chronic pain**. Chronic pain can be caused by an illness or injury, or sometimes from an unknown cause. This type of pain is often difficult to treat. Some examples of chronic pain are arthritis; nerve pain (neuropathy) from diabetes, HIV or other illness; bone pain from a cancer or infection; and common muscle (musculoskeletal) pains such as back pain.

Chronic pain can become an illness all by itself. Having a long-lasting pain, especially when it is severe, can cause a great deal of physical and emotional distress. Pain that doesn't go away may interfere with sleep, movement, eating, thoughts, moods, and relationships. If pain is left untreated, it may have a very bad effect on a person's life.

Keeping Track of Pain

If you have frequent or constant pain, it's a good idea to keep a diary to track pain and to talk about it at every visit with your doctor. Include the following information that your doctor will want to know:

- Where do you feel the pain?
- When did the pain start?
- Is this a new pain?
- Describe how the pain feels: sharp, dull, burning, throbbing?

- When does the pain usually occur?
- Is there anything that makes the pain better?
- Is there anything that makes the pain worse (movement, medications)?
- Is the pain interfering with your life (going out, seeing people, sleeping)?
- What medications are you taking for the pain?

When you are keeping a diary of your pain, it is very useful to write down how severe it is. One way to rate the pain is by using a number:

How do you rate your pain **using a 0 to 10 scale**, where 0=No Pain and 10=Worst Pain Possible?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No Pain			Moderate Pain				Worst Possible Pain			

Rate your pain at least once a day. If you rate it in the evening, use the rating to describe how bad the pain has been, on average, during the whole day.

Pain Treatments

There are many safe and helpful ways to relieve or reduce pain. Here are some:

Medication

- Some pain medicines, such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and acetaminophen (Tylenol), can be purchased 'over-the-counter' without a prescription. These can be used occasionally for mild pain. You should check with your doctor before taking these medications on a continuing basis.

- If you have a great deal of pain from a serious illness or injury, the doctor may prescribe a stronger pain medication like an opioid, such as oxycodone, morphine, or fentanyl. Many people are afraid of these drugs, but when used properly, these medicines are usually safe.
- The doctor may also prescribe other types of drugs to help relieve nerve pain (neuropathy), muscle spasms, or other types of pain.

Tips for Managing Pain with Opioid Medication

- Take pain medication exactly as prescribed.
- Store your medicine in a safe place; keep it away from children and lock it up if there is a concern that it might be taken without your permission.
- Tell your doctor if you have any side effects, such as constipation or trouble thinking straight.
- Never stop the medicine abruptly. When you are ready to stop, your doctor will decrease the dose of your medication over a few days.

Treating Pain Without Drugs

- Techniques such as relaxation training, guided imagery and meditation can help to relieve pain. Ask your doctor how to learn these techniques.
- Rehabilitation therapies include Physical Therapy (PT) and Occupational Therapy (OT). Specially trained

therapists work with patients to teach them how to help their specific type of pain. These therapies may reduce pain or help you to better cope with it.

- Complementary and alternative therapies, also called integrative therapies, include music, art, and movement therapy; massage therapy; acupuncture; aromatherapy; Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, and the use of herbal and nutritional supplements.
- Your doctor may advise you to try one or more of these approaches or may refer you to a professional who can offer them. If you obtain a treatment by yourself, you should be sure to tell your doctor about it.

Talk To Your Doctor

One of the best ways to manage pain is by letting your doctor know how you feel. He or she wants to know about your pain and needs your help in finding what works best for you. If you are taking medicine and it is not controlling your pain, let your doctor know right away. It is easier to treat pain before it is out of control than to get it back under control.

Consider calling or seeing the doctor if:

- You have medication side effects like rash, itching, tingling or swelling.
- Your pain is getting worse or is severe.

Patient Education Series

Pain

When your symptoms are managed, you will:

- Enjoy activities and have more energy
- Enjoy family and friends
- Feel less stress and anxiety
- Get better sleep at night
- Have a better quality of life

This educational material is provided by the Palliative Care Project, a partnership between Community Care of Brooklyn and the MJHS Institute for Innovation in Palliative Care.