



Pain Frequently Asked Questions

What is pain?

Pain may cause discomfort, distress or agony. It is a part of most sudden onset diseases, most chronic diseases and is a constant presence in many people's lives. Pain comes from injury, disease or damage to your body. In fact, it is often the first sign that something is wrong. It can be caused by your diagnosis, the stage of your disease, your response to pain and/or your pain treatment. There are several kinds of pain and many causes of pain but one fact is a constant: pain is always unique to the person experiencing it.

Many people think that pain is a normal part of their medical condition and something they just must live with. Other people think that pain is caused by growing older. In reality there is almost always a real problem behind pain. We usually think of pain as coming from the body but pain can also be emotional and/or spiritual. Whatever the source, whether it is short-lived or persistent, we do have the ability through knowledge and the necessary tools to reduce pain in almost every situation.

What if pain is left untreated?

An individual's response to persistent pain may include:

- Physical symptoms - weakness, fatigue, nausea, drowsiness
- Emotional responses - anger, irritability, withdrawal, crying, depression
- Spiritual distress - fear, anxiety and denial

Pain in any form can decrease quality of life and affects everything: work, play, domestic relationships, friendships and self esteem. Pain exacerbates unresolved issues and makes it more difficult to process them.

What are the costs of pain?

Pain exacts a huge price in human suffering, in lost productivity, and in high use of health care resources. According to the National Pain Foundation, pain costs the US economy an estimated \$100 billion each year for medical expenses, lost productivity and disability payments. The suffering is immeasurable, however we do know that pain is one of the most common complaints among older adults. According to the American Geriatric Society, between 25% and 50% of older adults living at home and 45% to 80% of those living in nursing homes have significant pain.

What is your role in managing pain?

Pain interferes with your quality of life. It can make it hard to sleep, work, socialize with friends and family and accomplish everyday tasks. You have a right to the best pain control you can get and you have a responsibility to be sure it happens. Pain management works best as a collaborative effort between you and your doctor. It is essential that you participate in managing your own pain.

Things you can do:

- Talk to your doctor honestly about your pain and ask questions. What are the goals of your treatment? Are you looking at a cure for your condition or just to manage the pain?
- Insist that you participate fully in the decisions affecting your care.
- Answer your doctor's questions as accurately as possible and remember your honesty and what you report are critical factors in relieving your pain.
- Get the information you need. If you can, find a medical library open to consumers- many hospitals have one. Remember information is essential to successful pain management.
- Take your pain medicine as directed by your healthcare provider. Ask questions if you don't understand. Remember, it is important to prevent pain before it starts or gets worse.
- Pay attention to what your body and your mind are telling you. Anxiety, fear and depression can affect your ability to control your pain.
- Use supportive therapies such as a relaxation program to reduce your pain or meditation to reduce anxiety.
- Find the resources that are available in your community such as support groups, art, movement therapy.
- Try distraction to help. Have a massage, listen to music, pet your cat, play ball with your dog, enjoy the company of your friends and family. Stay as involved and active as possible.
- Focus on your spiritual self. Talk to your spiritual leader, clergy, chaplain, read and pray.
- When you need help, ask for it.

How does hospice approach pain?

Because the purpose of hospice is to support quality of life for patients and families, the management of pain is the focus of every plan of care. Beyond the physical pain management, hospice also works towards alleviating the pain of the patient's emotional issues; unresolved relationships and spiritual issues; dealing with the uncertainty and fears associated with end of life. When left untreated, every kind of pain, physical, emotional and spiritual, can sap a patient's strength, rob them of their will and even their human dignity. Hospice believes that every individual has the right to die comfortably, with dignity, and not to die in pain. First, the care plan addresses physical pain with pain medications and supportive pain management therapies that are selected working with the patient. Some people choose to have some pain in favor of remaining more alert. Some prefer increased levels of medication in order to be pain-free. After the physical pain is under control, the emotional and spiritual well being can be assessed and a variety of resources are available to respond to these needs for both the patient and the family.

Patient's Bill of Rights (from the American Pain Foundation)

As a person with pain, you have the right to:

- Have your report of pain taken seriously and to be treated with dignity and respect by doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals.
- Have your pain thoroughly assessed and promptly treated.
- Be informed by your healthcare provider about what may be causing your pain, possible treatments, and the benefits, risks and costs of each.
- Participate actively in decisions about how to manage your pain.
- Have your pain reassessed regularly and your treatment adjusted if your pain has not been eased.
- Be referred to a pain specialist if your pain persists.
- Get clear and prompt answers to your questions, take time to make decisions, and refuse a particular type of treatment if you choose.