

Pain Management

Pain is the most common reason that people go to the doctor. It is the way the body lets us know that something is wrong. When special nerve endings located throughout the body detect an unpleasant stimulus, these pain signals are transmitted along the nervous system to the spinal cord and to the brain. Pain can be helpful in alerting you to an injury. Many types of pain can be alleviated. In fact, if the pain persists and is not relieved, anxiety and stress can worsen the condition.

Types and Causes of Pain

Common types of pain include headaches, lower back pain, joint, muscle, bone or nerve pain. Pain can also result from diseases such as shingles, arthritis, diabetes, and cancer.

Pain can be categorized as ACUTE or CHRONIC. Acute pain is temporary and usually goes away when healing is complete. In many circumstances, acute pain may develop into chronic pain if treatments are improper or not provided. Chronic pain lasts for months and years and is often difficult to treat. Chronic pain can be disabling and can lead to depression, anger, helplessness, and insomnia.

Assessment of Pain

To enable your doctor to better understand and treat your pain, it is important to describe your pain as clearly and specifically as possible. Describe the onset, duration, frequency, intensity, and location of your pain. Tell your doctor what makes the pain better or worse and how it affects your daily living. Use words like sharp, dull, stinging, throbbing, burning, tingling, or gnawing to help your doctor understand your pain.

Pain Relief Methods

1. Medications

a. Over – the – counter or nonprescription drugs

Acetaminophen such as Tylenol is commonly used for pain without inflammation, but overuse can cause liver problems.

Non-steroidal anti – inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as: aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve). These drugs block the chemicals that trigger pain signals. Long-term use can cause stomach ulcers, bleeding problems, potential heart problems, and liver and kidney damage.

Most of the time, it is fine to take an OTC medication. You should talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you are on any prescription medications to be sure that it is safe to take them together.

b. Prescription drugs

Narcotics such as morphine and codeine, which are derived from opium, are often used for severe pain. These drugs block the transmission of pain messages from the spinal cord to the brain. Side effects include drowsiness, constipation, mood changes, nausea, and potential addiction. Studies show that psychological dependence on narcotics is rare once the pain goes away.

Antidepressants (drugs that are used to treat depression) and Anticonvulsants (drugs that are used to control seizures) are sometimes used to control certain types of chronic pain. Side effects include drowsiness, constipation, and dry mouth.

Injections with medications such as steroids and local anesthetics. Common injection sites are joint, bursa (sac like cavity located between joints), trigger points (painful muscle spots), or spine.

One of the main concerns for taking pain medications is addiction. According to pain management specialists, unless you have a history of substance abuse, pain medications rarely cause addiction. Addiction is a disease characterized by craving or loss of control. Simply taking medicine to relieve pain, even over a long period of time, does not make a person an addict.

It is most important that you take your medications correctly. Tell your doctor if the medication you have been given is not helping to control your pain or if you are concerned about becoming addicted.

d. Biofeedback

Self-monitoring and control of physical responses to pain using information provided by monitoring instruments.

e. Relaxation techniques

Guided meditation, deep breathing, muscles relaxation, hypnosis, visualization, and imagery to decrease muscle tension and pain.

f. Cognitive behavior therapy

Counseling sessions that provide support and instruction on coping skills to help relieve anxiety and promote healthier thoughts, emotions, and actions.

2. Non – Drug Therapies

a. Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

Electrical stimulation to nerve endings in the skin to stimulate the production of natural pain killers (endorphins).

b. Acupuncture

Insertions of needles along nerve pathways to stimulate the release of endorphins.

c. Physical therapy and exercise

A program that includes stretching, strengthening, and aerobic exercise. Regular and consistent activity, at a comfortable level, offers the greatest benefit. Heat/cold compress and massage relieve muscular and bone pain. Deep-heating techniques such as ultrasound and short wave diathermy also relieve pain.

Take Control of Your Pain

Each person perceives and feels pain differently. Your mind plays an important role in how you feel pain and respond to it. Keeping a positive attitude and focusing your attention on someone or something else can help lessen your pain. Remind yourself of what you can do and practice positive self-talk.

Work with your physician, physical therapist, and/or psychologist to create an individualized pain management plan. Using pain-relieving medication together with non-drug therapies can help you achieve better pain control.