



Pain and Ways to Manage It

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What the words mean

Pain

- An unpleasant feeling, sensation, or discomfort that can range from mild to severe.
- Can either be acute or persistent.

Acute pain

- Happens as a result of injury to the body (such as cuts, infections, disease).
- Tells us if something is wrong.
- Lasts from a few days to a few weeks.
- Goes away as the injury heals.

Persistent (chronic) pain

- Ongoing pain.
- Continues beyond the usual course of injury or illness.
- May spread beyond the original site of injury, or has no specific cause and serves no real purpose.
- Includes pain caused by chronic disease such as arthritis, muscle/back pain, or nerve pain.
- Can be life long but a person can learn ways to cope with the pain.

Opioid

- Medicines either made from opium or man-made to act like opium.
- Sometimes called 'narcotics'.
- Works to relieve pain.

Pain is a signal to the brain...

telling us there is a problem within our bodies. For example, pain in the chest tells us we might have a problem in our chest. It could be something with the heart, lungs, blood vessels, nerves, muscles, or bones.

Pain also tells us to stop a particular activity that may cause damage to our body. For example, if we touch something hot, pain tells us to jump away so we don't get burned.

This booklet explains the importance of managing pain, how to measure pain, the medicines used to manage pain, as well as other ways to help manage pain. It also addresses what opioids are, why you should gradually reduce opioids over time, how to taper off opioids, as well as how to store and dispose of opioids.

Why is it important to manage your pain?

Managing pain helps your body to recover.

- You are more comfortable while you heal.
- You are able to get back to doing your daily activities.

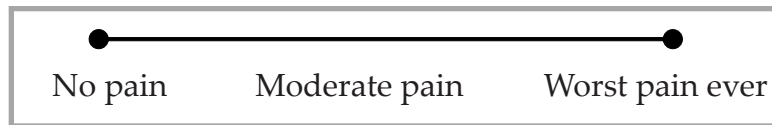
If acute pain is not treated early, it can become Persistent Pain. This is because the nervous system does not heal correctly. This can result in pain that does not go away. The pain can become a disease in itself. To make sure the nervous system heals correctly, make sure you have any acute pain treated properly with medicines and other therapies.

Measuring pain

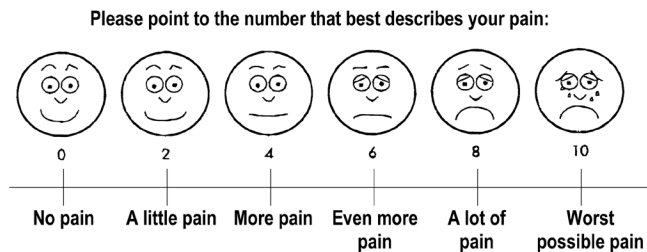
An important part of managing pain is monitoring how much pain you are having. The best way to monitor your pain over time is to use something to measure the amount of pain you have.

There are several different tools to help measure pain. These are the tools we use. Choose the one that works best for you. Use the same scale all the time. This makes it easier to compare your pain over time.

- Visual Pain Scale – We use a line on a piece of paper and ask you to mark on the line how much pain you are in. No numbers are used in this scale.



- 'Faces' Pain Rating Scale – Choose a picture that best shows the pain you are having. This tool is available in 22 languages. Ask your nurse for one in your language.



- Numbered Pain Rating Scale – We would ask you “On a scale from zero to ten, where zero means no pain at all and ten means the worst pain ever, how much pain are you having right now?”

If none of these tools work for expressing your pain, you can rate your pain based on size. Tell us if your pain is small, medium, large, or extra large.

Managing pain with medicine

Medicines are used to control or relieve pain. We refer to these medicines as pain relievers. You may also hear them called ‘analgesics’. These medicines work by blocking the pain messages to your brain.

There are several different ways that we give these medicines:

- By mouth, in either a pill or a liquid. This is the most common way.
- By injecting the medicine. There are two ways of doing this: injecting medicine just under the skin, or into one of the veins in an arm (called intravenous).

There are three types of pain relievers. The kind of pain reliever we give you depends on the type and amount of pain you are having.

- Non-opioid pain relievers
- Opioid pain relievers
- Other medicines that can be used to ease pain

1. Non-opioid pain relievers

These medicines are used for mild pain (small to medium pain). 'Non-opioid' means they do not have opioids in them. The most common way to take these medicines is to swallow a pill. Examples include:

- Acetaminophen (also called Tylenol)
- Salicylates (commonly called aspirin or ASA)
- Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen

While these medicines are not addicting, they do have some side effects:

- Acetaminophen is processed through the liver. If you drink alcohol on a regular basis, try not to take this medicine. Your liver may not work as well it should. Your liver may not be able to process this medicine.
- Some Salicylates and NSAIDs thin the blood and can cause bleeding.
- NSAIDs can cause an upset stomach, stomach ulcers, and abdominal pain.

Let your nurse know if you experience any of these while in the hospital:

- You get a skin rash.
- You have ringing in your ears (that you didn't have before).
- You have unexplained bleeding.
- You feel dizzy.
- You find it difficult to breathe.
- You get pain in your stomach.

2. Opioid pain relievers

Opioids are used for moderate to severe pain (medium to extra large pain). Some examples include: morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, fentanyl, and methadone.

Even though these are 'narcotics', do not worry about becoming addicted to any of these medicines. People only become addicted if they take opioid medicines for reasons other than to control pain.

Quick tips - When taking opioids

Opioids can lower your blood pressure. You may feel dizzy when you move around or change positions.

- Take your time when moving from lying to sitting, or sitting to standing.

Opioids can make you sleepy. This should go away within a few days of starting your pain medicine. If not, decrease the amount of opioid you are taking.

Opioids are constipating (where your bowel movements are difficult or painful, and your stools are small and hard to pass).

- Drink 8-10 cups of fluid a day. This does not include drinks with caffeine in them.
- Eat foods high in fibre such as bran, whole grains and cereals, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables.

If you have an upset stomach when taking these types of medicines:

- Take your pills with a full cup of water and at a time when you are eating, or just after eating. If you are still feeling sick to your stomach, take Gravol as directed.

Quick tips, *continued*

If you are taking long-acting opioid tablets:

- Swallow them whole. Do not crush or chew them. Crushing or chewing causes the drug to release immediately and could result in overdose or other unexpected side effects. It also causes the medicine to work for a shorter period than when swallowed whole.

Tell your nurse or doctor if you start to feel itchy all over. We may give you some medicine for this, depending on how itchy it is.

Do not take more opioid than your doctor has ordered, because you can reduce your ability to breathe with too much.

Use caution while using opioids with other medications that may cause sleepiness, such as medications that help with nervousness and sleep. It is best to talk to your doctor / nurse practitioner or pharmacist if you have these medications to take along with opioids.

Why should you come off opioids gradually?

Once you have been on opioids for a while your body gets used to having them.

You need to come off them gradually to prevent withdrawal signs: feeling jittery, nausea, vomiting, sweaty, agitated/irritable, flu-like symptoms.

Do not stop taking opioids suddenly or you may experience withdrawal symptoms.

Continuing to take opioids for long periods of time may affect your overall recovery and health.

How to come off opioid medication gradually?

When the pain becomes more manageable, you should start to come off opioids 10% - 20% of your total dose daily every 1 - 2 days.

Start to come down on the number of (opioid) pills you are taking gradually.

For example:

- If you are taking 2 pills every 4 hours, decrease to 1 pill, alternating with 2 pills, every 4 hours.
- Then after 1 - 2 days, step down to 1 pill every 4 hours for 24 hours.
- Then again, after 1 - 2 days step down to 1/2 pill every 4 hours.
- Then after another 1 - 2 days, consider stopping.
- If you still need them, extend the time between 1/2 pill to every 6 hours for 1 - 2 days.
- Then take 1/2 pill every 8 hours for 1 - 2 days.

Withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your body needs to come off opioids more slowly.

Taking other pain relieving medications, such as non-opioids like Tylenol or non-steroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen, may help you come off opioids. You should discuss with your doctor / nurse practitioner if these are alright for you.

How to store opioid medication?

Ensure others will not be able to access your opioid medications, especially children.

These medications should be kept out of sight and locked up.

How to dispose of extra opioid medication?

If you have unused opioids, dispose of them by returning them to a pharmacy drug return.

You may also dispose of them by crushing the pills and throwing them in the garbage.

NEVER save medications, thinking you may use them at a later date, as all medications have an expiry date and may not be safe to take later.

If you require more opioid medications, you should see your doctor.

Your opioid medications are only for *you* - NEVER share or give to others. Giving or selling these medications may put their health at risk. It is also illegal.

3. Other medicines that can be used to ease pain

There are medicines that are normally used for other medical conditions but also can relieve pain. Sometimes they work well on their own to relieve pain. Other times they work better when taken with opioids.

An example of a medicine that can be used to ease pain is Gabapentin. This medicine is normally used to prevent seizures but also works well for nerve pain.

If you find that other non-opioid or opioid medicines are not effective in easing or relieving your pain, talk to your doctor or nurse. One of these other medications might help your pain.

Other ways to manage pain

Medicines are not the only way to ease or relieve pain. The following methods are easy to do and don't need any special equipment. You can use these methods instead of taking pain relievers, or along with taking your pain relievers.

- Heat and Cold - Heat reduces pain by increasing blood flow, relaxing muscles, and giving a warm sensation. Cold reduces pain by decreasing blood flow and swelling, and numbs the area for short periods.

Heat and cold can also be used together by alternating between the two. Talk to your family doctor or nurse about what is best for you. If your pain becomes worse with either heat or cold, stop using it.

- Massage - This increases the blood flow to the area and relaxes the muscles. Massage can also help to relax your whole body, take your mind off the pain, and generally reduce your stress.
- Activity and Exercise - Light exercise helps strengthen your muscles, keeps your joints flexible, and makes it easier for you to tolerate or handle your pain.
- Distraction – This is when you do activities that interest you. Doing an activity can distract you from your pain. In other words, it can help keep your mind off your pain. For example: reading books, watching TV, listening to music, playing cards.
- Deep Breathing – When you focus on deep breathing, you help relax both your mind and body. Find a quiet place and sit comfortably. Slowly and deeply breathe in for 3 seconds, hold breath for 2 seconds, and then slowly breathe out for 3 seconds.

Deep breathing, *continued*

Note: If you have had recent surgery on your abdomen, hug a pillow or hold your hands over your surgery site to support these muscles when you deep breathe.

Points to remember when you go home

- Try other ways to manage your pain, either instead of, or as well as, your pain medicine.
- Don't wait until your pain gets really bad before taking medicine or using other ways to ease the pain.
- Drink 8-10 cups of water a day.
- Eat foods high in fibre such as bran and whole grains, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Swallow your pills whole.
- If you have an upset stomach from taking your pain medicine, take Gravol as directed.

When to call your doctor / nurse practitioner:

- If your pain is not controlled using the medicines you were instructed to take.
- If you have any of the following:
 - Feeling very dizzy
 - Feeling too sleepy all the time
 - A skin rash
 - Itching all over
 - Ringing in your ears (that you didn't have before)
 - Unexplained bleeding
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Pain in your stomach.

What if you have questions after leaving the hospital?

It's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Your nurse practitioner
- Your pharmacist
- HealthLink BC, Telephone 811 (or 711 for TTY)

Want to know more about pain?

You can also check these resources:

- HealthLink BC: www.HealthLinkBC.ca
(Search 'pain' to get started)
- Pain BC Society: www.painbc.ca
- Canadian Pain Society:
www.canadianpainsociety.ca

(tear out section)

To control your pain	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Fill the prescription for opioids and take them when you need them (if ordered for you).2. To control your pain, either take 1 to 2 tablets of plain acetaminophen every 6 hours, or take your opioids as directed.3. Swallow your pills whole (Do not chew them).4. Do not wait until your pain gets really bad before taking medicine.5. Try cold or hot packs, massage, and rest to help ease your pain.6. If you have an upset stomach from your pain pills, swallow your pills with a full glass of water or eat something before you take your pills. If that does not help, take a medication for nausea. Check with your pharmacist as to what to take. Follow the directions on the label. <p>If your pain gets worse or does not get better with pain medication, call your family doctor or nurse practitioner.</p>
To prevent constipation	<p>Make sure your bowel movements are your normal pattern.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water per day.2. Increase activity as you are able.3. Eat a balanced diet with vegetables, fruit, grains, and protein. Limit foods that cause constipation. If you have questions on what you should eat, call 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a dietitian.4. Take stool softeners or laxatives if needed. You can buy them from a pharmacy without a prescription. Follow the directions on the label.
If you have swelling	See page 9 of 'Pain and Ways to Manage It' pamphlet
If you have a wound	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Keep wound/dressing clean and dry.2. Watch for signs of infection such as increased pain, large amounts of swelling, increased tenderness or warmth around the wound, redness around the wound or a red streak along your skin out from the wound, bad smelling or coloured pus, or a fever.3. Do not scratch or put pressure on your wound.4. Ask your healthcare provider when you are allowed to have a bath or shower.

(tear out section)

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Taking Pain Medication at Home

- Every 4 hours, check how much pain you are having using the pain scale on page 4 of 'Pain and Ways to Manage It'.
- When you are decreasing the amount of pain medications:
 - **First** reduce how much you are taking (the dose in milligrams or mg).
 - **Then** reduce how often you are taking the medication.
- Make sure your bowel movements are your normal pattern.

You can take 1 to 2 tablets of plain acetaminophen (such as Regular Tylenol) by mouth every 6 hours when needed.

Do not take any more than a total of 3200 mg in 24 hours.

Do not take acetaminophen if:

- You are allergic to acetaminophen.
- You are also taking opioids that have acetaminophen in them such as Tylenol #3.
- You currently have problems with your liver

If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist.

Your pain medications to take at home:

1. _____ mg every _____ hours
2. _____ mg every _____ hours
3. _____ mg every _____ hours

(tear out section)

Before I left the hospital, I was taking this much pain medication in 24 hours:
 _____ opioids and/or _____ plain acetaminophen and/or _____

My Pain Medication Diary

Check your pain level every four hours. Use this chart to help you remember to take your pain medications as directed.

'Med' or 'meds' means medication: Write in the name of the medication and how much you took in milligrams (mg)

Time I took	Day 1	Time I took	Day 2	Time I took	Day 3
	Date: _____ My pain score _____ med: _____ mg med: _____ mg med: _____ mg		Date: _____ My pain score _____ med: _____ mg med: _____ mg med: _____ mg		Date: _____ My pain score _____ med: _____ mg med: _____ mg med: _____ mg
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