



Pain Management

A guide for patients

Most pain can be managed with medicine and other treatments. This guide gives information about controlling pain and talking with your health care providers so we can find the methods that work best for you.

Patient Rights and Responsibilities

I have the right to have my pain:

- Believed by all involved in my care
- Checked on a regular basis
- Dealt with quickly

I am responsible for:

- Asking about my pain relief options
- Describing and rating my pain
- Asking for medicine when my pain first begins
- Telling if the medicine or treatment worked

Therapies for Pain

Non-drug methods to help ease your pain:

Talk with your health care provider to learn more about:

- Hot/cold packs
- Positioning
- Music therapy
- Relaxation and imagery
- Therapeutic touch
- Hypnosis

Some pain medicines should be taken on a regular basis while others are taken “as needed.” This means you need to take the pain medicine when you first begin to feel pain so that you can “stay on top” of the pain.

Pain may be managed with these medicines:

- *Nonopioids* such as Tylenol, aspirin, ibuprofen
- *Opioids* (such as Morphine)
- *Local anesthetics* (medicines that block pain signals at nerves)

Pain medicines may be given by:

- Mouth (pills, capsules, liquid)
- A bandage-like patch placed on your skin
- A needle placed in your vein (IV line)
- A machine that allows you to control your IV medicine (PCA)
- A small tube inserted in your back in the area around your spinal cord (*epidural catheter*)

Myths about Pain Medicines

1. “I might get addicted.”

Some people don’t want to take pain medicine because they are afraid they will become addicted. Research shows that this is not a problem. When pain medicines are used as prescribed, patients rarely, if ever, become addicted to them.

2. “I’ll have terrible side effects.”

Side effects like nausea, itching, sleepiness, or constipation can be resolved by changing the medicine, changing the dose, or adding simple treatments.

3. “I don’t want to seem like a ‘complainer.’”

You have a right to ask for pain relief. Also, your health care providers need to know about all of your symptoms, including pain, to give you good care.

It Is Important to Manage Your Pain

Pain that is not relieved can delay your healing by:

- Making it hard for you to rest or sleep
- Making it hard for you to breathe deeply, cough, or walk
- Causing you to lose your appetite
- Making you sad or anxious by trying to deal with your pain alone

For these reasons, please tell your health care provider when your pain is not well controlled.

How to Communicate with Your Health Care Team

1. **Ask your health care provider what to expect:**
 - Will there be much pain after surgery or with my illness?
 - How long is it likely to last?
2. **Discuss your pain control options:**
 - Tell us what pain control methods have worked well in the past.
 - Tell us how you use drugs or alcohol. You may need your medicine dose adjusted.
 - Talk about any concerns you have about pain medicines, such as fear of addiction.
 - Ask about side effects that may occur with treatment.
3. **Learn about the assessment tools you can use to measure your pain.** (See “Tell Us About Your Pain” below.)
4. **Ask for pain medicines when you first begin to feel pain.** Tell your health care provider if you have pain that won’t go away or that is new.
5. **Include your family or support persons in making a pain control plan.**

Tell Us About Your Pain

Tell your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, and family or friends:

- Where you feel pain.
- What it feels like (sharp, dull, throbbing, etc.).
- How strong the pain feels.
- If the pain is always there or if it comes and goes.
- What makes the pain worse.
- What makes the pain better.

Taking care of your pain is important. It helps you feel stronger and better able to cope with your illness or get better from surgery.

Pain Scales

Using one of these pain scales will help you tell us how much pain you feel. Use the one that works best for you.

Choose a number from 0 to 10 that best describes your pain:

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

OR: Choose a word that best describes your pain:

No Pain	Mild	Moderate	Severe
---------	------	----------	--------

OR: Choose the face that best describes your pain:

					
No Hurt	Hurts Little Bit	Hurts Little More	Hurts Even More	Hurts Whole Lot	Hurts Worst

Face scale from Wong DL, Hockenberry-Eaton M, Wilson D, Winkelstein ML, Schwartz P: Wong's Essentials of Pediatric Nursing, 6/e, St. Louis, 2001, P. 1301. Copyright by Mosby, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Staff are also available to help.

UWMC patients:

206-598-_____

Or, call the main
UWMC operator at
206-598-3300.

SCCA patients:

SCCA Women's
Center:
206-288-7300

SCCA General
Oncology:
206-288-7400

Facts About Opioid Pain Medicines

How much medicine should I take?

Follow the instructions on the prescription bottle. If your pain does not get better, call your health care provider to talk about changes in your pain medicines.

How long does it take the medicine to start working and how long will it last?

- **Immediate-acting medicines** start working in about 30 minutes and last about 4 hours. Examples are *oxycodone* and *morphine*.
- **Slow-release medicines** start working in about 60 minutes and last 8 to 12 hours. Examples are *Morphine SR* and *Oxycontin*. Do **not** crush or chew these medicines. Swallow them whole.

What are the common side effects caused by pain medicines? How can I avoid them?

- **Constipation:** To prevent constipation, drink plenty of water and take a stool softener such as *docusate* (Colace). If you become constipated, use a laxative such as *senna* or *milk of magnesia*. If the problem continues, call your health care provider.
- **Drowsiness:** Avoid alcohol and other medicines that make you sleepy because they will add to the drowsiness caused by the pain medicines. Do not drive or use machinery while taking pain medicines.
- **Nausea:** Take the pain medicine with food if you are having an upset stomach.

How do I get a refill of my pain medicine?

Many opioid pain medicines require a new prescription each time you need a new supply. Your pharmacist will be able to tell you if you can get refills of your pain medicine or if you need to call your health care provider for a new prescription.

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER



UWMC Patient Care Services

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195

© University of Washington Medical Center
Published: 05/2011, 11/2011
Clinician Review: 05/2011

Reprints on Health Online: <http://healthonline.washington.edu>