

# Pain Management – Frequently Asked Questions

*Urology Care*  
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*The Official Foundation of the  
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There are many ways to think about pain and to describe pain. Each of us feels pain in different ways. This makes it very hard to say what pain is and how to measure it. We can think of pain as an unpleasant or uncomfortable feeling. It can be a physical feeling or an emotional feeling related to injury to the body. Pain is a sign that something is wrong. The uncomfortable feelings protect us from events that might harm us. Always remember **pain is your personal experience. It is what YOU say it is. This fact sheet will help answer some of your questions about pain.**

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PAIN?

Yes, there are several types of pain:

- **Acute Pain** – pain that will go away after the cause of the pain or shortly after the injury heals. It usually lasts less than 3 months.
- **Sub-acute Pain** – pain that can last for 3 to 6 months.
- **Chronic Pain** – pain that goes on for more than 6 months. Chronic pain can be troubling, and can cause stress, anxiety, depressed mood and sadness.
- **Nociceptive Pain** – this pain occurs when you injure your body's tissue. An example of this pain is when you twist your ankle.
- **Inflammatory Pain** – this pain comes after you injure yourself. This pain starts as your body begins to heal.

## SHOULD I LEARN TO PUT UP WITH PAIN?

No, you should never think of pain as normal. Pain can be a sign that something wrong is going on in your body (example: kidney stones).

When you have chronic pain, it can affect many aspects of your life. Your pain can interfere with your relationships with family, friends and co-workers. Your pain also may affect daily activities like eating, sleeping, walking and using the restroom. You need to find out what is causing your pain so that you can know what can help it. When pain is controlled, you can improve your health and get back to the activities you enjoy.

## HOW DO I TALK ABOUT MY PAIN SO THAT MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER AND FAMILY CAN UNDERSTAND?

You need to tell your health care provider how your pain feels so that he/she can try to figure out what is going on. Your health care provider may ask you to tell him/her how your pain feels on a scale of 0-10. On this scale, zero is no pain, one is hardly noticeable and ten is the absolute worst pain that you can possibly imagine.

Tell your health care provider how you feel. Talk with your family members so they can help you explain your symptoms when necessary.

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## HOW DO I MEASURE MY PAIN?

Unfortunately, it is hard to measure or test for pain. How you feel pain is very personal. The most reliable way for your health care provider to measure pain is by asking you questions like the ones below:

- How does your pain feel?
- How long have you had the pain?
- How long does your pain last?
- What makes the pain better?
- What makes your pain worse?
- Does body position, movement, activities, eating or drinking make a difference?
- Where do you feel the pain?
- Does the pain radiate (travel) to other body parts?

## WHAT TREATMENT CHOICES DO I HAVE FOR MY PAIN?

To manage your pain, you should treat the condition causing it. Medication is a common treatment for pain. However, medications alone may not lessen or completely cure your pain. The best results may come from combining different types of treatments. These treatments include:

- Pain medications
- Physical rehabilitation
- Psychological counseling
- Social support

## WHAT MEDICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO CONTROL MY PAIN?

Some of the most effective pain medicines are those used to treat nerve pain. Some anti-epilepsy medicines that work well for this kind of pain are:

- Pregabalin (Lyrica)
- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Topiramate (Topamax)

The anti-depressants below also work well for some people:

- Cymbalta
- Venlafaxine (Effexor)
- Amitriptyline, or Nortriptyline

Some patients do well with over-the-counter pain medicines such as Tylenol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as Aleve or Advil. Weak opioids such as Tramadol may also work in relieving pain.

## WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a class of drugs used to reduce pain. Some commonly prescribed opioids are:

- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin)
- Methadone
- Fentanyl

Although doctors prescribe opioids to treat moderate to severe pain, opioids can have serious risks and side effects. This class of drug is not a first choice for pain management. Opioids are for people who do not respond to non-opioid pain medications.

## WHAT ARE SOME SIDE EFFECTS OF PAIN MEDICATIONS?

The goal of pain management is to find the most relief with the least amount of side effects. Some persons may have many medication side effects while others may tolerate even high doses with few or no side effects. Common side effects of pain medications are:

- Tiredness
- Sleepiness
- Forgetfulness
- Stomach irritation
- Liver and kidney damage
- Nausea and constipation
- Vomiting
- Dry mouth
- Dizziness
- Low sex drive
- Itching
- Sweating

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It is important to tell your health care provider about past alcohol and drug use and other medications you are taking. This will prevent taking medicines that do not work well together. Always take your medication as directed—read the label and any additional information provided with your medicine.

## **WHEN WILL A UROLOGIST PRESCRIBE PAIN MEDICATION TO ME?**

Urologists may prescribe pain medications for conditions, such as:

- Interstitial Cystitis (IC)
- Kidney Stones
- Prostatitis
- Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)
- Urotrauma
- Cancer (Prostate, Bladder, Kidney and Testicular)

In addition, your urologist may give you pain medication to help after you have had surgery. You may need opioids for “breakthrough” pain. This is pain not controlled with other medications. For major surgeries and inpatient hospital stays, local anesthetics, NSAIDs and/or opioid medications are used. Talk to your urologist about the pain you are having so they can help you as best as possible.

## **WILL I HAVE PAIN AFTER CANCER TREATMENT?**

Yes, you can expect to have some pain after cancer treatment. Pain can come from testing, surgery, chemotherapy or radiation.

Side effects of treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation also can cause pain. If not well managed, pain can cause some patients to stop treatment too soon. Be honest about your pain and your symptoms. Having an open and honest discussion can ensure your health care provider develops the proper treatment plan for you.

## **WHICH PAIN REMEDY IS MOST EFFECTIVE FOR TREATING CANCER PAIN? WHICH IS LEAST EFFECTIVE?**

No single pain remedy is more or less effective for treating cancer pain. Cancer pain varies and depends on the source

of the pain and on each individual. With that said, surgical pain may be best relieved with oral pain medications. And, pain related to chemotherapy or radiation treatment may need a mix of several pain treatments.

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF TAKING PAIN MEDICATIONS?**

Chronic pain can interfere with your work life, home life and social activities. The greatest benefit from taking pain medication is pain relief and a better quality of life. The risks are the many possible side effects. Even the most common over-the-counter medications may have side effects.

Your health care provider is your partner in managing your pain. He/she will help you take advantage of the benefits of medication treatment while avoiding the side effects as much as possible.

## **AM I LIKELY TO BECOME ADDICTED TO PAIN MEDICATION?**

Research has shown a combination of genetic, environmental and developmental factors are risks for addiction. Before you start opioid therapy for chronic pain, your health care provider should develop treatment goals. These goals should be realistic ones for pain and functioning. Goals should consider how therapy will be stopped if the benefits are not greater than the risks.

If your health care provider monitors you regularly then your risk of addiction decreases.

## **HOW SHOULD I STORE MY PAIN MEDICATIONS?**

You should store your medications as directed on the container. Pay attention to what the directions say about temperature. For example, should it be in a cool, dry place or stored in the refrigerator?

You should **never** keep your medications where children can reach them. Never share your prescribed medications with others. If you are unsure of how to store your medication, ask your pharmacist or health care provider.

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## HOW SHOULD I GET RID OF ANY MEDICATION THAT I DO NOT USE?

If you have medication left over, **DO NOT** put them in the garbage or toilet. Follow the instructions provided by the manufacturer and/or pharmacy. You should **NEVER** collect and store unused controlled substances. If others get hold of your unused medicines, it may cause them harm.

## WHERE DO I GO TO GET MY PAIN MANAGED?

Pain can be very complex and difficult to treat. You should start pain management discussions with your family doctor. Many people need to see several specialists to get relief. Depending on the source and type of pain you are having, your health care provider may refer you to a pain clinic.

At the pain clinic, a pain management team will address your physical, spiritual and psychological needs. To get the best results, pain is managed from all directions at the same time. This is called “multimodal pain management” approach.

## WHO CAN PRESCRIBE PAIN MEDICATIONS?

In the US, primary care providers prescribe almost half of all opioid prescriptions. These primary care providers include medical doctors, as well as nurse practitioners and physician assistants. According to Federal law, only registered practitioners can prescribe opioids and other “controlled substances.”

## MY PHYSICAL PAIN IS CAUSING ME EMOTIONAL PAIN. IS THERE HELP FOR THAT?

It is common for emotional pain to stem from physical pain. For this reason, many treatment plans include a counselor or psychologist to help you deal with the effects of pain. There are also many support groups available for pain sufferers.

Although pain management is a tricky and complicated matter, there is hope for relief for everyone. Remember to see your health care professional, take any medications as prescribed and don't give up. There *is* help out there for you.

## ABOUT UROLOGY CARE FOUNDATION

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic Foundation—and the official Foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make healthy changes in their lives. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more about different urologic issues visit **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions**. Go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

## DISCLAIMER

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

For copies of printed materials about other urologic conditions, visit **UrologyHealth.org/Order** or call 800-828-7866.

Patient resources made possible through the generous support of



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