

Pain

We all know that pain is hurt or discomfort. We think of pain as physical suffering, but it can also be emotional or spiritual suffering. In any case, it is an experience that can only be felt and described by the person with the pain.

Understanding your pain

Pain should be reported to your care team, by yourself, if you are able, or by your family/caregivers. Use these suggestions to communicate effectively:

- Report the severity or intensity of the pain as a number, using a scale from 0 as no pain to 10 as the worst possible pain imaginable. Other ways of reporting pain are also available, such as faces or descriptive words. Ask your nurse to tell you more about these options.
- Where is the pain?
- Is it new pain?
- Try to describe the pain. Here are some words you might use: shooting, dull, burning, constant, squeezing, aching, pressure, gnawing, stabbing or deep.
- Does the pain keep you from doing usual activities?
- What makes the pain worse?
- What makes the pain better?
- Has the pain changed either in location or intensity?
- How well is the pain medication working?
- Are there any side effects of pain medication, such as constipation, nausea, vomiting, sleepiness, dizziness, or itching?
- Is pain leading to prolonged or excessive sleepiness?
- What is the effect of the pain on you and your caregiver/family? (Are they anxious or unsure about how to give the medicines? Are you becoming irritable from lack of sleep because of the pain?)

What can help relieve and prevent pain

There is much you, your caregivers and your care team can do to manage your pain. The team will try to find the reason for the pain and discuss treatments with you.

- Medications are often necessary to relieve pain. Your nurse will give you information about the medicines, when they should be taken, and what you should know about them. It is important for the medicines to be taken as ordered.
- Report any medication side effects to your nurse. Side effects can often be treated and may stop after you have taken the medication for a few days.
- In addition to medication, there are many other things that might help the pain; a few are listed here. Consider trying them, and ask your care team if you want information about these or other ideas for pain relief:
 - › Relaxing activities
 - › Distracting activities, such as watching TV, humor, listening to music, playing with a pet, or playing a game
 - › Breathing exercises
 - › Soaking in a tub
 - › Guided imagery (picturing relaxing scenes to distract the mind from the pain)
 - › Heating pads or warm compresses
 - › Cold, such as an ice pack
 - › Smells of certain essential plant oils (aromatherapy)
 - › Light massage
 - › Acupressure or acupuncture
 - › Reiki