

Pain and Balanced Pain Management - Fact Sheet

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Pain Overview

- Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience that is conveyed to the brain by sensory neurons. Certain types of neurons are capable of transmitting a pain signal to the brain.¹
- Pain is a complex phenomenon. Biological, genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors contribute to how people experience pain, how severe pain is and how long pain lasts.¹
- Pain is a highly individual and subjective experience; no one experiences pain or responds to pain treatment in exactly the same way.¹
- Pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care. It is a major reason people take medication and a leading cause of work disability.¹

Difference Between Acute and Chronic Pain

- Pain is typically categorized as acute or chronic.
- Acute pain usually begins suddenly and lasts a short time.¹ Causes include trauma, broken bone, laceration, injury, surgery, childbirth, dental procedures and burns.
- Chronic pain persists over a longer period of time than acute pain and can become worse with environmental and psychological factors. It is often difficult to treat.²
- Causes of chronic pain include underlying medical conditions such as arthritis, heart disease, fibromyalgia, shingles, cancer, migraines and headaches, or pain can become chronic following an injury or surgery.
- Chronic pain can be its own disease, causing changes to the nervous system that worsen over time.¹

Impact of Pain

- Psychological effects, such as depression, anxiety, distress, loss of control and anger often occur with pain and can significantly impact a person's daily functioning and overall quality of life.^{1,3}
- Pain can disrupt sleep, strain personal relationships, impair one's ability to participate in daily and leisure activities and affect one's ability to work.³
- Chronic pain affects approximately 100 million U.S. adults.¹
- Chronic pain has a significant economic burden, costing \$560 billion to \$635 billion annually in direct medical treatment costs and indirect costs due to lost productivity.¹

Gaps in Pain Treatment

- Many people receive inadequate pain assessment and treatment, resulting in unrelieved and improperly treated pain.^{1,3}
- Following emergency room visits, 74 percent of patients continued to experience moderate-to-severe pain at discharge.⁴

- More than 80 percent of patients experience post-surgical pain immediately after surgery until two weeks after hospital discharge.⁵
- Pain is one of the most common reasons for postsurgical hospital readmission, extending recovery time and hospital stays.⁶
- Up to one-half of all patients experience chronic pain following common surgical procedures.⁷

Pain Treatments

- Health care professionals use a combination of non-pharmacological and pharmacological approaches to treat pain, such as:
 - Over-the-counter medications, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), acetaminophen, aspirin and naproxen; and prescription medications, such as COX-2 inhibitors, muscle relaxants, anti-anxiety drugs, antidepressants, anti-seizure medications, steroid injections and opioids
 - Physical therapy and structured exercise
 - Psychosocial treatment and counseling to teach coping skills and lifestyle and behavioral modifications and to manage the emotional and social aspects of pain and its impact on the family
 - Complementary therapies, such as therapeutic yoga, meditation, acupuncture, hypnosis, therapeutic massage, biofeedback and nutrition counseling
- An integrated approach that uses a combination of safe and effective medical, physical and rehabilitative, and psychosocial treatments is often needed to treat and manage pain to address its complex nature.
- Integrated approaches may produce the best results, especially if a person's pain is severe or persistent.¹

What is Balanced Pain Management

- Important attention is being given to the rise in abuse, misuse and diversion of prescription pain medications, but many people still receive inadequate pain assessment and treatment.¹ According to a recent report issued by the National Institutes of Health, 40 to 70 percent of people with chronic pain are not receiving proper medical treatment.⁸
- Balanced pain management is a comprehensive approach to understanding and treating pain that recognizes the complexity of pain and uses a combination of physical therapy and rehabilitation, counseling or psychological-based treatments and medication that includes the patient's own perspectives, needs and goals.
- In a balanced approach to pain management, the person with pain becomes an active participant in his or her health care, along with family members and caregivers, to ensure access to appropriate care. Together, they learn to manage pain in safe, effective, responsible and healthy ways to improve or maintain their overall well-being.
- If and when medications are required, balanced pain management ensures that the safest possible medications are prescribed, dispensed, taken, stored and disposed of responsibly.

Pain Medication Responsible Use and Storage

- Unintentional overdosing and abuse and misuse of prescription pain medications is a real and growing problem:

- Nearly 60 percent of prescription medications used non-medically are obtained from family or friends.⁹
- In a survey, nearly 50 percent of teens said they believe that prescription drugs are much safer than illegal street drugs, and 60 to 70 percent said that home medicine cabinets are their source of drugs.¹⁰
- In a typical year, more than 71,000 children aged 18 and younger are seen in U.S. emergency rooms for medication overdoses.¹¹
- Tips for safe and responsible use, storage and disposal include:
 - Always store prescription pain medications where they can't be accessed by children, teens or others in the household. Keep them out of reach or locked up.
 - Follow the medication's directions, and never change the dose or abruptly stop taking the medication without talking to a physician first.
 - Never share prescription pain medications with another person or mix them with alcohol.
 - For tips on securing medications, visit <http://medicineabuseproject.org/what-you-can-do/safeguard-your-home>.

New Medication Disposal Regulations

- In September 2014, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) passed a regulation that expands options for safely and responsibly disposing of unused prescription medications, like opioid pain medications, stimulants and anti-depressants.¹²
- The new rules encourage public and private entities to develop a variety of methods to collect and destroy controlled substances in a secure, convenient and responsible manner.
 - Recent approaches include having collection receptacles at pharmacies, clinics or hospitals and establishing mail-back programs.
 - Information about where to find community collection sites can be found by visiting the DEA at www.DEA.gov.
- According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), unused medications also can be mixed (not crushed) into coffee grinds or cat litter, sealed in a plastic bag or container and thrown away with household trash. The FDA also allows disposal of certain medicines by flushing.¹³ Newer technologies for home disposal may offer alternative, environment-friendly options.
- Before beginning a prescription pain medication, talk to a doctor about the risks and benefits of the medication and formulate an "exit strategy" for removing unused medications from the home. According to a recent report issued by the National Institutes of Health, patients and their physicians need to work to formulate an "exit strategy" for the discontinuation of opioid therapy.⁸
- For tips on proper disposal and finding a local take-back location, visit <http://medicineabuseproject.org/what-you-can-do/medicine-disposal>.

References

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