

PAIN RELIEF AFTER YOUR SURGERY

Important to your recovery

This booklet discusses why pain relief is important, how and when to ask for help with pain, concerns patients have about seeking help with pain, and examples of pain relief methods.



PAIN RELIEF AFTER SURGERY

by

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What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant feeling, such as soreness or discomfort that is different for every person. Pain can tell you when something is wrong with your body and when you need to ask for help.

Surgery causes pain for most people because tissues are moved and/or cut. Pain that is not treated can be severe. It is important for your recovery not to have severe pain.

Everyone feels pain differently, even if they have the same surgery. After surgery, nurses and doctors will ask you to rate your pain. They want you to tell them when you are hurting and how much the treatments relieve your pain. You are the only one who knows how your pain feels. Your help is very important to getting the best pain relief possible.

Why is pain relief so important?

People usually have some pain after surgery. Severe pain can prevent you from moving and breathing properly and *can cause complications that make your hospital stay longer*. It is important for you to have as little pain as possible to get well faster.

Good treatments are available to help relieve pain, especially medications after surgery. Other methods such as massage, deep breathing and relaxation exercises also may help. Everyone's pain experience is different and you need to choose what works for you. You can use several methods at the same time.

People used to think that they had to "Be Strong" and "Put up with Severe Pain". Now, doctors and nurses do not want you to do this because *unrelieved pain can slow your recovery*. Good pain relief is possible with your help.

How and when do I ask for help with pain?

It is very important for you to tell the nurses and doctors how much pain you are having, what it feels like, and whether treatments are working. ***If your pain rating is 4 or more, please tell the nurse.***

1. A rating scale helps to tell us how much you hurt.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No Pain		Mild Pain		Moderate Pain			Severe pain		Worst Pain	

2. To ask for help, say to your nurse and /or doctor:

“My pain is 4- I need something for pain”

How often should I ask for pain medication?

Medication usually relieves pain for about 4 hours. Therefore, to keep your pain rating below 4 when you are moving and/or doing your deep breathing exercises, you need to take your pain medication every 4 hours. ***You need less pain medication if you take it regularly*** than if you wait until your pain is severe. If you take the medication regularly and your pain is not below 4, ask for a stronger pill.

What drug treatments are available for pain relief?

- A. Type:** Strong medications to relieve moderate to severe pain can be taken orally such as morphine or Percocet™. Weaker medications such as Tylenol™ and /or codeine help if your pain is mild. If your medication is not working, please ask for a stronger one.
- B. Method:** Your medication will first be given by intravenous (IV) into the vein. Some patients may be told by the nurse to use a special pump that gives you medication when you press a button. Pills are used when you are allowed to drink. They can be as strong as IV or needles. If pain comes back before the next dose, ask for more pain relief.

All methods require that you take the medication regularly for pain relief.

What are patient's concerns?

Many patients have concerns that stop them from telling someone about their pain and/or using pain medications. Here are some responses to these concerns:

Concern:

I am not a "good" patient if I tell someone about my pain.

Response:

- 1. "Good" patients DO tell when they hurt** – You are a very important member of the pain management team and your help is needed. Please tell the nurse when you hurt and whether the pain treatment is working.
- 2. Nurses EXPECT you to tell them when you hurt** - They do not want you to "Handle it" by yourself. – You are helping by telling nurses when you hurt and if your medication is not working. They want you to have as little pain as possible. Tell them anything that has helped you with pain in the past.
- 3. Pain does NOT mean you are healing** – Unrelieved pain may slow healing and cause complications. People whose pain is well controlled after surgery recover faster.

Concern:

I don't have pain, I have "discomfort" or "soreness".

Response:

Pain can be called other names – Use the pain scale to rate your word for pain such as "discomfort" or "soreness". If your rating is 4 or greater, discuss with your nurse about taking a pain medication. Not every person uses the word "pain".

Concern:

I am afraid to take pain medication because of addiction and/or side effects.

Response:

- 1. Addiction is not a problem** – It is rare (<0.01%) for people taking medication for pain unless they already have a drug abuse problem.
- 2. Constipation is preventable** – constipation can happen with pain medications. To prevent a problem, most patients need to take a stool softener and/or laxative while on medication. Talk to the nurse if you are not being given these.
- 3. Nausea is treatable** – do not refuse to take pain medication because of nausea. Nausea may happen when you first take pain pills. They doctor has ordered medication that usually takes the nausea away. Ask your nurse for this.

Concern:

I don't want to have a needle.

Response:

Strong pain medication does NOT have to be given by a needle – Needles hurt and are usually not used if you are allowed to drink. Pain medications such as Percocet™ work as well as morphine.

What non-drug treatments are available for pain relief?

There are several non-drug treatments that you can use to relieve your pain after surgery. Tell the nurse if there are methods that have helped you in the past. Patients have found the following helpful in addition to medications.

- Pillow(s) to support incisions during movement, breathing, and/or coughing
- Advice on how to turn in bed and sit up
- Massage
- Music, reading, TV or other distracting activities
- Application of heat

