

Your Pain Can Be Managed

Developed by the American Pharmacists Association. Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

Are You in Pain? You're Not Alone

Each year, nearly 1 in 5 Americans reports persistent pain from injuries, surgery, arthritis, cancer, or other conditions. Unfortunately, not everyone in pain receives treatment.

You don't need to live with constant pain. Although chronic pain rarely goes away completely, your health care team has many options to make your pain more bearable.

No Gain From Pain

When it comes to pain, some people believe that they should "grin and bear it." Others feel that their health care team isn't interested in their pain. In truth, poorly managed pain is bad for your health and can lead to other problems.

- Pain causes harmful changes to your body.
- Untreated pain can lead to anger, irritability, depression, and poor sleep. It can make the quality of your life worse.
- Persistent pain affects your relationships with family and friends, and your ability to do your job.

The longer you wait to address your pain, the more difficult it becomes to treat. Your first step is to find a health care team that can help you.

Finding the Right Health Care Team for You

Not all health care providers are well trained to assess and treat pain. Others may have personal biases against treating pain. To find a treatment that works, you may need to interview several health care providers. Look for people who:

- Believe your reports of pain. (Don't work with anyone who tells you "it's all in your head.")
- Have experience treating pain.
- Thoroughly explain to you the risks and benefits of various treatments.

- Listen to your questions and make sure you understand their answers.
- Regularly assess your pain and monitor your progress.
- Refer you to a specialist if you are not getting adequate relief.

When you interview health care providers, ask these questions:

- Do you have experience treating my condition?
- How would you describe effective pain management?
- What treatment options are available for me?
- How will you select my treatment plan?
- How much relief can I expect to receive from these treatments?
- What side effects should I look for? How can I manage them?
- What are the short-term and long-term outlooks for my condition?

Working With Your Health Care Team

Once you have found a good team, the next step is yours. Not everyone is comfortable talking about pain, but your team needs accurate information to treat you. Provide these details:

- How long you have had pain.
- Where the pain hurts the worst.
- What treatments you have tried on your own, and how they have worked for you.
- What makes the pain better or worse.
- How the pain feels. For example, is it sharp, dull, or achy?
- How the pain interferes with your activities, including work, dealing with family and friends, and ability to care for yourself.

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Treatment Takes Many Forms

Once your health care team understands your pain, a treatment plan is the next step. Your doctor may suggest medication. Some medications are available over-the-counter. Others, you can only get with a prescription. Doctors rely on several families of drugs to treat pain. You may have heard of some of these families:

- NSAIDs—used to treat mild to moderate pain and inflammation. Aspirin and ibuprofen are both NSAIDs.
- Acetaminophen—also used to treat mild to moderate pain.
- Opioids—prescribed to people who have moderate to severe pain.

In addition to medications, other treatments such as massage, physical therapy, relaxation therapy, and behavioral and psychological therapy may be helpful. Your pain management plan may include some of these treatments, often in combination with medications.

What You Should Know About Pain Medications

No one pain medication is right for all people. And no one medication will be right for you all the time. Some medications work better for certain types of pain.

Medications can cause side effects in some people. A medicine that works well for your friend may produce an unacceptable side effect for you. Or, one that caused your mother problems may be just right for you. Work closely with your health care team to find the treatment that works best for you and has the fewest side effects.

Keep in mind that your pharmacist is a medication expert who can answer your questions about both prescription and over-the-counter medications.

What About Addiction?

Many people fear that using certain medications to manage pain will cause them to become addicted. Keep in mind that being *physically dependent* or *tolerant* to a medication is not the same as being *addicted* to it. If you use a prescription opioid for more than a few days, you may become *physically dependent* on it. If you abruptly stop taking the medication, you may experience nausea, shaking, or other uncomfortable symptoms. If you become *tolerant* to a drug, the same amount of medication has less effect over time because your body has adapted to it. *Physical dependence* and *tolerance* are physical conditions—*addiction* is a psychological condition. (People with addiction also may experience physical dependence and tolerance.)

People who are addicted to a substance have a loss of function—they have lost control over their use of the substance, and they continue using it, even if it means making other areas of their life worse. (If you think you might be addicted to drugs or alcohol, treatment is available. Talk to your health care provider or visit Recovery Network at www.sober.com or by phone at 866-762-3747.)

On the other hand, people who use opioids for a medical reason have an increase in function. The medication may allow them to take part in activities with work, family, and friends.

If you have any concerns about the effects of your medications, be sure to discuss them with your pharmacist or your health care team.

For More Information

To learn more about pain and how to manage it, contact these organizations:

American Chronic Pain Association
www.theacpa.org
800-533-3231 (toll-free)

American Pain Foundation
www.painfoundation.org
888-615-7246 (toll-free)

Partners Against Pain
www.partnersagainstpain.com