

Understanding Pain

A Guide for Patients/Families

The unpleasant experience of pain is universal and one of the most common reasons for which a patient seeks help from a doctor.

Pain may be experienced as a result of injury, surgery, medical procedure or a disease process, for example cancer. It is important to note that pain, either as part of a disease or as a disease itself, can be controlled.

Why Is It Important To Control Pain?

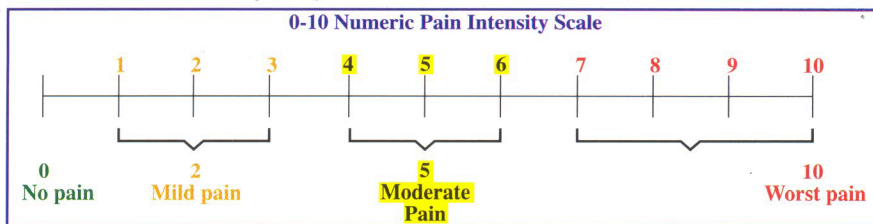
Unrelieved pain can cause sleep disturbance, fear, anxiety, frustration, depression, loss of everyday normal activity and psychological problems. For preserving the quality of life, effective pain relief is essential.

Where Can I Get More Information About Controlling Pain?

You can talk to anyone in your health care team, who can provide information about different options available for controlling pain. We also have two dedicated pain services covering acute and chronic pain. These services are available 24 hours a day to manage your pain. Contact numbers are given at the end of this booklet.

How To Assess And Measure Pain?

Recently, pain has been identified as the "fifth vital sign" that must be considered when caring for all patients, no matter what their primary medical care. The measurement of pain is difficult because of its subjective nature. In our hospital, a pain rating scale is being used to assess your pain. You will be asked to rate your pain from 0 to 10



Alternatively, you can also describe your pain as mild, moderate or severe.



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What are Different Options for Pain Control?

Pain can be controlled by various methods as mentioned below

- **Conventional Methods** Pain relieving drugs are the first line of treatment and can be given through different routes
 1. By mouth in the form of tablets or liquids;
 2. As Suppository;
 3. Intramuscular;
 4. Intravenous;
 - a. At regular interval
 - b. Continuous infusion
 - c. Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) Intravenous pain medication that patient gets automatically by pressing a button.
- **Nerve Block Procedures**
 - a. Epidural
 - o Medications given to the patient through a thin tube at his/her back
 - b. Nerve block specialised procedure
 - o By suppressing the nerve carrying the sensation of pain, using strong medications closer to nerves;
- **By Modern Radiofrequency Current Treatment of Nerves**

Can You Tell Me About The Medication Used ?

- **For Mild Pain:**
 - o pain killers e.g. paracetamol can be given by mouth
- **For Moderate Pain:**
 - o You will probably need a combination of two drugs, a non steroidal anti-inflammatory drug e.g. brufen and a stronger drug like morphine, an opioid medication.



- **For Severe Pain:**
 - o You will need opioid medication e.g. morphine or pethidine by intramuscular or intravenous routes. In certain circumstances PCA, epidural or nerve blocks can be instituted to manage your pain.

These pain medications can be prescribed by your doctor.

What is Opioid Medication?

Opioids are a group of medicines that have been used for many years to manage pain. They are classified as weak or strong. Weak opioid is a misleading term because these drugs can be very effective for a variety of pain. These may be taken separately or used in combination with paracetamol for e.g. Co-proxamol. Strong opioids include Morphine, Pethidine, Fentanyl and Buprenorphine etc. Some opioids for example, Tramadol can act like weak or strong opioid depending on the dosage used.

Are There Any Side Effects Of Opioids?

Some people may feel drowsy, confused or nauseous when they first start taking opioids. In most of the patients, these side effects wear off after few days.

Many people are constipated while taking opioids. Weight gain or weight loss sometimes occurs when taking long term opioids. Your physician may advise you regarding these problems.

Can I get addicted to pain killers ?

Addiction to opioids that have been prescribed for pain relief, appears to be rare, but it is a serious problem if it does occur. Addiction occurs when people use medication like morphine for reasons other than pain control. If you use these medicines as prescribed by your doctor, the chance of addiction is very small.



Can my pain be managed without medication?

There are many ways to relieve pain without the use of medication. These include:

- Relaxation Technique;
- Massage;
- Distraction;
- Heat or cold application;
- TENS (Trans Electric Nerve Stimulation).

These methods can be used alone or with medication.

I Still Feel Pain Despite Taking Regular Pain Medicine As Prescribed By My Doctor. What Should I Do?

You may suffer from complex pain as a result of an old injury, underlying disease process or even an unknown source. You must consult a pain specialist who will give you expert advice on managing and treating pain including psychological side effects or ask your physician to seek advice from pain management service.

For further information please contact:

The Aga Khan University Hospital
Karachi
Tel # 4930051 ext: 1025/ 1077
Pager numbers: 7419 (for 24 hours)
7450 / 7444 (from 0800-1600 hours)