
Managing Pain

What is pain?

- It is what the individual says it is
- Hurting or discomfort
- A condition that can cause physical, emotional or spiritual distress and can contribute to financial stress
- An experience that can only be felt and described by the person with the pain
- Pain affects everyone involved
- Older adults may describe pain as aching, burning, gnawing, grabbing, being uncomfortable, soreness
- Children may express pain in different ways, such as they may sleep more, become irritable, or have other behavior changes. They may use words like oowie or boo-boo to describe pain
- Confused patients, those with cognitive impairment, or those that cannot speak for themselves may have behavior changes such as pacing, moaning, agitation, grimacing, and furrowed brow that can indicate pain

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team?

- How severe or intense the pain is. It can be reported as a number using 0 as no pain and 10 as the worst possible pain imaginable. Other ways of reporting pain are also available such as, mild to severe, using different types of pictures. Ask your nurse to tell you more about the options for reporting. There are also options for rating children's pain.
- Where the pain is located
- If the pain keeps you from doing your usual activities
- What makes the pain worse
- What makes the pain better
- What does the pain feel like (burning, sharp, stabbing)
- Is the pain constant or does the pain come and go
- How well the pain medication is working
- How often you are taking pain medication
- Any side effects of the medication (common side effects include: constipation, nausea, vomiting, sleepiness, dizziness, itching)

- Concerns about the medications, how to take them or how to administer them
- If you are becoming irritable from lack of sleep because of the pain

What can be done?

The good news is that there is much you, your caregiver, and the hospice and palliative care team can do for managing pain. They will try to find the reason for the pain and discuss treatment options with you. Medications are usually necessary to relieve pain – the nurse will give you information about the medicines, when to take them and what you need to know.

- It is important to take or administer the medicines as ordered
- Many side effects can be treated and/or may even stop after taking the medication for a few days
- Other things that can make the pain better are:
 - Relaxing activities such as listening to music, light massage, soaking in a tub of warm water, or guided imagery (picturing enjoyable and relaxing scenes to take one's mind off the pain)
 - Distracting activities such as watching TV, playing a game, or just thinking of other things
 - Heat or cold (such as a heating pad, warm compress, or ice pack)
 - Pleasant smells of certain plants or fragrances (aromatherapy) such as lavender, etc.
 - Storytelling, drawing
 - Deep breathing
- Ask your hospice and palliative care team to teach you how to use these ways of relieving the pain

Once medications are no longer needed your hospice and palliative care team will advise you on the proper disposal of medications.

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

References

Bergen K. Pain management at the end of life. *Hospice and Palliative Core Curriculum for the Nursing Assistant*, Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association; 2009.

Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2011.

Approved by the HPNA Education Committee January 2006.

Reviewed July 2009, July 2013.