

Managing Pain JAMA Patient Page

Pain is an important and serious symptom, and is one of the most common reasons that patients seek medical care. Some diseases and conditions can produce sudden and severe pain (such as fractures or other injuries) while other disorders can cause chronic and sometimes disabling pain (such as advanced cancer). If you are experiencing pain, contact your doctor who can determine the underlying reason for the pain and can explain the safe and effective options for managing your pain.

An article in the April 5, 2000 issue of JAMA reports on the use of opioid-based analgesics (strong painkillers, like morphine) to treat severe pain and its relationship to drug abuse (overuse or improper use of a substance or drug for a purpose other than its original medical purpose, for instance, to get high rather than to relieve pain). The researchers found that even though the use of these painkillers for medical purposes has increased, the rate of abuse of the prescription drugs remains relatively low.

Common Types of Pain

- **Headache** pain can range from mild pain from a tension headache to a severe and incapacitating pain from a migraine or another headache-inducing process.
- **Arthritis** pain refers to pain involving the joints; the pain is usually related to wear and tear on the joints (osteoarthritis) or swelling and thickening of the soft tissues in and around the joints (rheumatoid arthritis).
- **Low back** pain may be related to abnormalities of the spine (such as previous fracture) or muscle strain; poor posture and lack of exercise can contribute to low back pain.
- **Cancer** pain can be due to a number of conditions including pressure caused by a growing tumor or the spread of cancer to other areas of the body.

Some Drugs Used to Treat Pain

- Acetaminophen is a non-aspirin pain reliever.
- Anti-inflammatory drugs reduce pain and inflammation; include aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen, among others.
- Opioid-based drugs, sometimes called narcotics, used to treat more severe pain, such as the pain experienced after surgery.

If you are taking any other drugs (prescription or non-prescription drugs) tell your doctor so that he or she can help you avoid drug interactions. Also inform your doctor before you take a new non-prescription or prescription drug.

Some Other Therapies for Treating Pain

- Physical Therapy – use of specific exercises and activities to help control pain and improve physical functioning.
- Psychological Therapy – individual or group counseling with a trained health care professional can help by offering psychological support and by providing techniques for coping with pain.
- Relaxation Techniques – stress and tension can make pain worse; relaxation techniques can help relieve stress caused by anxiety.

For More Information

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
1-800-352-9424
www.ninds.nih.gov

American Pain Foundation
1-888-615-7246 (615-PAIN)
www.painfoundation.org

American Academy of Pain Medicine
A Patient's Guide to Pain Medicine
www.painmed.org

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