

Pain: Coping and Managing



Pain is your body's way of letting you know that something is wrong. Your body's nerve endings send pain signals to your brain.

What's your experience?

Everyone experiences pain differently. Pain can be dull or sharp, and it can throb or burn. It can move from one area of your body to another.

Pain from an injury, from a headache, or right after surgery usually starts quickly and lasts a short time.

But other pain can go on for months or longer. This pain can be caused by an injury that doesn't heal or a health problem like low back pain, very bad headaches, or diabetic neuropathy.

No matter how much or why or for how long it hurts, pain can make it hard to work, sleep, or be active. And pain that lasts a long time can take the joy from your life. But controlling or treating pain can help.

What can you do to stop the pain?

How you treat your pain usually depends on what's causing the pain, how long you've been in pain, and how bad it is.

You and your doctor can work together to find ways to control your pain so you can feel better and do more for yourself.

Medicine is one way to treat pain, but the risks and side effects can add up to more problems. And sometimes pain goes on longer than you can safely take a medicine. There are other options you could consider.

Some ideas to discuss with your doctor include:

- **Activity.** At first, it may not seem possible that some activity can help when it hurts to move. But a light activity like walking could be the key to helping reduce your pain.
- **Relaxation.** Trying to relax is another thing that may seem difficult to do when you're in pain. Stress makes pain worse. That is because your muscles tighten with stress, which can cause headaches and pain in your neck, shoulders, and back.
- **Counseling.** Sometimes pain is like an unwelcome guest that won't leave. So you may need someone to help you figure what to do to live with it for a while. A professional counselor can help you cope with pain, stress, and things that happen in your life. Counseling can help you understand and deal with pain.

These are just a few ideas to think about. You and your doctor can talk about others like physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, or even hypnosis.

With these different options, you may end up on a care team that includes you, your doctor, a physical therapist, and others. You and your team can work together to help you feel better.

How long does pain last?

Whatever treatment plan you choose, try to give it some time to work. Some treatments may take a few days or weeks to improve your pain. And

sometimes your plan may include a combination of ways to treat your pain. You and your doctor can talk about how long you should stay on a medicine or other treatment.

Even with treatment, you may always have a certain level of pain. But pain doesn't have to control your life. You can find ways to manage and cope.

What about medicines?

Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help you feel better. But remember, medicines can be dangerous, especially if you don't take them the right way. Your doctor will work with you to find the right types and doses of medicine.

Pain management can get complicated. That's why it's a good idea to have one doctor who prescribes and who can keep track of your medicines.

Safety tips for taking pain medicine

- Follow directions carefully.
- Use a pain diary to keep a record of your pain.
- Don't start any new medicines before you talk to your doctor.
- Store medicines in a safe and secure place.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about how to safely get rid of any leftover medicine.

Talking to your doctor

If you'd like, use the space below to write about your thoughts about managing your pain. You could take your ideas to discuss with your doctor. Or you could use this to take notes at your next doctor's visit. This is your space to fill.

My thoughts about managing pain