



Unrelieved pain is a serious health problem. When pain is poorly managed, complications can develop, such as:

- Slow-healing wounds.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Loss of strength and mobility.
- A lack of interest in eating and drinking.
- Disturbed sleep patterns.
- Thoughts of suicide.
- And...needless suffering.

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Pain Management Fact Sheet

Just for You from In the Know!



WHAT IS PAIN?

Pain **IS**:

- A sensation that *hurts*—causing discomfort, distress or even agony.
- An uncomfortable feeling that tells you something may be wrong in your body.
- A message that travels between the brain and nerve cells throughout the body.
- Difficult to define because the sensation is *different* for each individual.

Pain is **NOT**:

- A normal part of getting older.
- Necessary to “build character”.
- Something that can be measured with a blood test or an x-ray.
- All in people’s heads.
- As well-managed as possible for many people, especially those over age sixty-five.

WHAT IS PAIN MANAGEMENT?

Pain management is the process of providing medical care in order to ease or reduce someone’s pain. It is a basic part of good client care—*because every client has the right to expect relief from pain!* All members of the health care team must work together to:

- Take every client’s report of pain *seriously*.
- Determine every client’s level of pain. A one-time assessment is not enough. It must be done on a *regular* basis.
- Treat all pain according to the physician’s orders and, when those orders include medications, being sure to use those pain medications *effectively*.
- Explore additional ways to manage the pain—besides drugs.
- Help clients and their families learn about all the different ways in which pain can be reduced or eliminated, including the benefits, risks and costs of each potential treatment.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CLIENT'S PAIN IS THE FIRST STEP!

Does Your Client Have Acute Pain?

- Pain is considered *acute* when it is temporary, lasting for a few hours or, at most, up to six months.
- Usually, acute pain comes on suddenly, as a result of disease, inflammation or injury—and goes away when the healing process is complete.
- Most of the time, acute pain serves a purpose because it “warns” the body of a problem that needs fixing.
- The cause of acute pain can usually be identified and treated—which makes it easier to feel sorry for the person in pain.
- When people are in acute pain, their discomfort tends to be obvious. In fact, acute pain can “rev up” the body, causing pale, sweaty skin and an increase in heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure.

Or Is Your Client's Pain Chronic?

- Pain is considered *chronic* when it is long term—lasting for six months or more.
- Often, chronic pain comes on gradually. People may have a hard time pinpointing when it started and/or describing it to others.
- Chronic pain serves no purpose since it keeps on long after the healing process is complete.
- The cause of chronic pain can be difficult to diagnose and may persist despite treatment.
- When people are experiencing chronic pain, the source of their discomfort may not be obvious to others. They may just seem depressed. This is because chronic pain can “slow down” the body, causing a decrease in both heart rate and blood pressure.
- Other people may not understand or feel sympathy for someone's chronic pain because there may be no visible cause of the discomfort.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP TREAT YOUR CLIENT'S PAIN?

- Remember that the most reliable way of assessing the severity of a client's pain is to listen to what he or she has to say about it!
- Watch for *non-verbal* clues that your client is in pain, such as restlessness, rubbing or holding a body part, rocking or grimacing.
- Help your clients keep a diary of their pain—writing down when it begins, when it gets worse and what helps relieve the pain. This information can help with pain management.
- Try to keep your clients laughing! It has been proven that laughter releases certain chemicals in the body that act as a natural pain medication.
- If a client asks you for a PRN pain pill, let a nurse or a family member know that the client is in pain and needs attention.
- Document any specific words that your clients use to describe their pain such as: sharp, aching, pounding, stabbing or tingly.



Remember...there is no “right” or “wrong” way to deal with pain. Every client may handle it differently.

- Understand that your clients will probably have good days and bad days. So, be flexible about your client care, providing more assistance on days when the pain is bad...and less on days when a client seems to do more for himself.
- Remember...it is your duty to notify your supervisor when you know—or *suspect*—that your client is in pain.