

## **Pain Management While in the Hospital**

### **Why do I feel pain?**

Pain is an unpleasant feeling that can be an ache or a sudden sharp stab. Physical pain is caused by tissue damage and it also involves the emotion felt when there is physical pain. Every person feels pain differently; however, whatever the person says he/she is feeling is his/her true perception of pain.

### **What is the difference between acute and chronic pain?**

Acute pain is felt for a short period of time and then it goes away either with treatment or because of the body's own healing process. It may last from 6 to 12 weeks depending on the cause. Usually some type of injury or surgery causes acute pain.

When acute pain does not go away, it is called chronic pain. This type of pain lasts for 3 months or more, and can last for many years. It may be caused by:

- Cancer
- An old injury
- A chronic condition such as arthritis

Chronic pain may not completely go away, but it can be treated to reduce or alleviate the pain.

### **Why is pain management important?**

It is important to control pain in order to carry out daily functions comfortably. Pain that is well managed allows for walking, doing breathing exercises and other

activities that promote strength and prevent complications while in the hospital.

You can be involved in your pain management by doing the following:

- Discuss your pain management options with your physician and nurse.
- Let your physician know what pain medications worked best for you in the past or if you have had bad reactions/side effects to any that should be avoided.
- Let your physician and nurse know what makes the pain better and what makes the pain worse, including different positions or ice.
- Also discuss your comfort function goal. This is the level of comfort you need to be at in order to carry out your daily activities of living, deep breathe, get out of bed, and walk.

### **Will I be asked about pain?**

While in the hospital, all of the clinical staff will ask you what your "level of pain" is currently. This pain level is based on a pain rating scale of 0 through 10. The staff will ask you frequently "On a scale of 0 to 10, what is your current level of pain?"

The 0 is equal to no pain and the 10 rating is the worst possible pain you can imagine. With this pain scale, we also use the Wong-Baker Faces Pain Rating Scale to help you determine what level of pain you may be in. The 0, or smiling face, on the faces scale equals no pain; and the 10, or crying face equals the worse possible pain.

It is important to let the staff know how you are feeling and if you are in pain so that pain medication can be given to you for your comfort. After you take pain medication, your nurse will check to make sure the medication was effective in giving you pain relief. This is how the staff assesses, or determines, whether or not the pain medication is working for you.

### **What do I do if my pain medication is not working?**

It is important to let your doctor and/or nurse know if you are not getting relief with your pain medication that is prescribed. Every person is an individual and reacts differently to pain medication. If you are not getting relief, your physician can prescribe a different pain medication. It is also important to ask for your pain medication before the pain becomes so severe that it is difficult to control.

### **How is the pain medication given?**

Pain medication is given in different forms, such as in tablets, by injection, or by an intravenous line directly into your vein.

### **Are there any side effects I should know about with my pain medication?**

Depending on the medication, you may experience some side effects. These may include:

- Constipation—it is important to drink plenty of fluids (unless you are on a fluid restriction) and to eat a high fiber diet to prevent constipation.
- Drowsiness—many people experience drowsiness, or tiredness when taking pain medications. Once you are home, it is important not to drive or operate any heavy machinery when taking pain medications, such as narcotics. It is also important not to make any important legal decisions until the effects of the pain medication have worn off.
- Some people experience dizziness when they first take pain medications. While in the hospital, it is important to call for assistance getting out of bed to use the toilet or to walk after taking pain medications to prevent falling.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages while taking pain medication.

Source:

Aspen Center for Patient Education. (2001). *Pain Management: Patient Education Resource Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publication.

Rev. 2/2013

