

# Facts About Pain

## Pain

Pain is an unpleasant physical and emotional experience that can affect a person's quality of life.

Pain is subjective. In other words, logic and common sense do not always apply to pain. If left untreated, pain can affect quality of life and the ability to function and interact with others.

Pain—especially chronic pain—is very common in older adults. It affects more than half of senior citizens and 45–80 percent of nursing home residents.

How a person deals with pain is influenced by a variety of factors:

- Physical
- Mental
- Psychological
- Physiological
- Biochemical
- Emotional
- Social
- Cultural
- Religious

## Effects of aging

Older adults may suffer from multiple medical problems, and therefore, can have different types of pain at the same time. Pain may be a warning that something is wrong.

As we age, we may:

- Find we do not respond as quickly to painful stimuli as in the past
- Assume that pain is a normal part of aging

## Risk factors and causes

Risk factors for pain include:

- Terminal diseases such as cancers
- Being bed-bound or immobile
- Osteoporosis
- Inability to communicate
- Amputations
- Skin breakdown
- Stroke
- Parkinson's Disease
- Contractures

## Pain symptoms

Pain can come on suddenly (acute) or be persistent (chronic). Types of pain vary widely but the most common types of pain are from headaches and lower back and joint pain, which is often caused by osteoarthritis.

Symptoms of pain include:

- Oral or dental problems
- Depression and sadness
- Frowning, grimacing or grinding of teeth
- Guarding or rubbing a body part
- Restlessness
- Striking out
- Increased agitation
- Change in habits (sleeping poorly)
- Moaning or groaning

- Decrease or increase in activity level
- Change in behavior
- Loss of function (decrease in normal range of motion)
- Resisting being moved or resisting help
- Weight loss

Many nursing home residents cannot communicate their pain so the nursing staff attempts to watch for non-verbal signs of pain such as non-interest in food or sleep, facial grimacing, change of mood and physical movements that indicate pain.

### Treatment

The method of pain management used depends on the severity of the pain. The nursing staff will try to determine the cause of the pain. However, pain is not always easy to treat, and the underlying cause is not always found.

Various types of medications are available for pain relief. In addition to medications, some comfort measures that can be used to reduce or treat pain include:

- Back rub or massage
- Reassuring words and gestures
- Touch
- Topical pain killers
- Distraction techniques
- Soothing music
- Reflecting on pleasant things and memories

What you can do to help

- Acknowledge that your loved one is experiencing pain.
- Inform the nursing staff about pain-relieving activities that have helped in the past.
- Help the staff create a log of what aggravates the pain and what seems to help alleviate it.
- Bring some of your loved one's favorite things from home that could serve to distract him or her from pain.
- During a visit, direct the conversation to focus on pleasant times and happy memories.

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