



Manage Your Health: One Step at a Time

Pain Management: Pain Basics

Everyone experiences pain at one point or another. It often is an indication that something is wrong. Each individual is the best judge of his or her own pain. Feelings of pain can range from mild and occasional to severe and constant.

What Is Acute Pain?

Acute pain begins suddenly and is usually sharp in quality. It serves as a warning of disease or a threat to the body. Acute pain may be caused by many events or circumstances, including:

- Surgery
- Broken bones
- Dental work
- Burns or cuts
- Labor and childbirth

Acute pain may be mild and last just a moment, or it may be severe and last for weeks or months. In most cases, acute pain does not last longer than six months and it disappears when the underlying cause of pain has been treated or has healed. Unrelieved acute pain, however, may lead to chronic pain.

What Is Chronic Pain?

Chronic pain persists despite the fact that an injury has healed. Pain signals remain active in the nervous system for weeks, months, or years. Physical effects include tense muscles, limited mobility, a lack of energy, and changes in appetite. Emotional effects include depression, anger, anxiety, and fear of re-injury. Such a fear may hinder a person's ability to return to normal work or leisure activities. Common chronic pain complaints include:

- Headache
- Low back pain
- Cancer pain
- Arthritis pain
- Neurogenic pain (pain resulting from damage to nerves)
- Psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside)

Chronic pain may have originated with an initial trauma/injury or infection, or there may be an ongoing cause of pain. However, some people suffer chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage.

How Is Pain Treated?

Depending upon its severity, pain may be treated in a number of ways. Symptomatic options for the treatment of pain may include one or more of the following:

- Drug treatments such as non-prescription medications like Aleve, Motrin, and Tylenol or stronger medications such as morphine, codeine, or anesthesia. Other drugs -- like muscle relaxers and some antidepressants -- are also used for pain.
- Nerve blocks (the blocking of a group of nerves with local anesthetics)
- Alternative treatments such as acupuncture, relaxation and biofeedback
- Electrical stimulation
- Physical therapy
- Surgery
- Psychological counseling
- Behavior modification

Some pain medicines are more effective in fighting pain when they are combined with other methods of treatment. You may need to try various methods to maintain maximum pain relief. Consider signing up for the *Help Yourself* workshop to learn more about managing your chronic conditions.

Source: WebMD. <http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/guide/pain-basics>