



Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

*Nursing Best
Practice Guideline*

Gaining Control of Your Pain

Did you know that pain is one of the most frequent reasons why people seek assistance from a healthcare professional?

Studies show that uncontrolled pain is a common problem for people of all ages and can be a big problem for you and your family. Uncontrolled pain can have an impact on your daily activities and may make you feel depressed and upset. Family members may feel helpless and distressed when they cannot assist in relieving your pain.

You have the right to the best pain relief possible!

The Canadian Pain Society states that people have the right to the best pain relief possible. If you are in pain, you can be confident in knowing that knowledge and resources exist to provide good pain relief and to improve your quality of life. Nurses and other healthcare professionals are there to support people and to ensure that effective pain relief strategies are available and offered.

There are different ways to deal with different types of pain (acute and chronic). However, there are some guiding principles that nurses and other healthcare professionals will use to help you, no matter which type of pain you are experiencing:

- Pain is unique and different for each individual regardless of age or special needs – *Pain is what you say it is.*
- If your pain is not relieved, this needs to be assessed and ways to relieve the pain must be identified.
- You and your family should be involved in making pain management decisions.
- Your whole healthcare team should be involved in managing your pain.

The first step is a pain assessment:

You are the best person to describe your pain. However, if you are not able to speak for yourself, your family should be involved in the pain assessment. When nurses are assessing your pain, you may be asked the following:

- Where is your pain? Is there more than one place where you are feeling pain?
- What does your pain feel like? What words would you use to describe your pain (e.g., aching, sharp)?
- What makes your pain feel better or worse?
- Does your pain move anywhere?
- How is the pain affecting your activities?
- When does your pain start? How long does it last? How often does it occur?
- How would you rate your pain using a 0-10 scale? (A scale may have numbers, or may include words such as 'no pain' to 'worst pain', or pictures of faces to help you describe your pain).
- How much pain are you experiencing when resting and when you are active? (using a 0-10 scale)
- What medications are you taking? What dose? How often? How long have you been taking them? How much are they helping (using a 0-10 scale) to relieve your pain?

What happens next?

The answers to these questions, along with information from a physical exam and tests (e.g., x-rays) will provide you and your healthcare providers with information to develop a plan to manage your pain. Your plan may include medication and other things such as exercise and heat/cold therapy. As part of your care, you should be asked on a regular basis to describe your pain, and whether the pain is improving. Your plan will be changed as necessary.

Speak to your nurse, doctor or other healthcare professional when you first start feeling pain, and get involved in your (or your family member's) pain management plan! It is often easier to control pain in its early stages before it becomes severe. Remember, you have the right to the best pain relief possible.



This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Assessment and Management of Pain*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rnao.org/bestpractices.



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