

Pain Management

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Pain: The Fifth Vital Sign

- Pain is defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience. However, it's important to realize that with pain, it's whatever the person experiencing it says it is and exists where the person says it does.
- To find out whether a person is healthy or not, we often check the four major vital signs: blood pressure, temperature, pulse and respirations. In addition, we should check to determine whether the person is experiencing any pain. This is now being called "the fifth vital sign," because we know the presence of pain is an indication of a health problem that should be investigated. When patients tell you they are having pain, or you see nonverbal signs of pain, you should always report this to your supervisor.

Pain: The Fifth Vital Sign Cont.

- In addition, we must remember that only the patient really knows how he or she is feeling or how much pain he or she is experiencing. The person having pain is the only expert on this subject, and no one else has the right to make judgement about the type or amount of pain an individual has. We must always believe a person's self-report of pain. Typically, if a person is seeking medical help with pain being a factor, he will be given a chart and asked to identify or rate the face of pain that best reflects what he feels. This chart could be a series of faces, or even a scale of one to 10.
- How do you know if someone is in pain and can't or won't tell you? You can gain a lot of information by looking at the face and the movement of your patient. Words often do not reflect what the person is actually experiencing. For the person's own reasons, he or she may not wish to share verbally with you.

Nonverbal Signs of Pain

- Watch for these nonverbal signs of pain:
 - Guarded movements
 - Facial grimacing
 - Rapid heartbeat
 - Rapid breathing
 - Sadness or depression
 - Elevated blood pressure
 - Restlessness or sleeplessness
 - Moaning, groaning, or sighing
 - Bracing or tensing the muscles
- Any of these symptoms should be reported to your supervisor.

Types of Pain: Acute

- Acute pain is severe and usually signals an injury or illness that must be treated. Kidney stones and heart attacks cause acute pain. When the cause of the pain is cured, the pain goes away.
- Acute pain can be a symptom of serious problems that require emergency treatment. Acute pain is generally too intense to ignore and will often cause people to clutch the part of the body that is in pain. This type of pain indicates that medical attention is needed.

Types of Pain: Chronic

- Chronic pain is persistent, ongoing pain that lasts for weeks, months, or years. Sometimes the pain was originally caused by an injury or illness that was cured, but for unknown reasons the pain continues. There may be an incurable disease causing the pain, such as cancer. Chronic pain can even occur without any known injury or illness causing it. The best that can be done in these situations is to treat the pain, without curing the underlying disease.
- Chronic pain is not always constant and continuous but can come and go. Sometimes chronic pain becomes very sharp or severe for a time and then subsides. It can be very disabling to live with chronic pain, because the pain makes it too painful or tiring to perform everyday activities. Chronic pain can be exhausting.

Types of Pain: Chronic Cont.

- Chronic pain is caused when the nervous system keeps sending out pain signals repeatedly. It can cause loss of appetite, depression, irritability, and sleeplessness. Chronic pain sufferers get caught in a vicious cycle of exhaustion and depression that can make the pain worse. The pain can be exhausting.
- New medicines and treatments make it possible to relieve even the most severe pain. No one today should have to live with untreated chronic pain.

Major Types of Chronic Pain

- The following are some of the common kinds of chronic pain. Each has a variety of causes.
 - Headache
 - Low back pain
 - Cancer pain
 - Arthritis pain
 - Angina- chest pain caused by restricted blood flow to the heart
 - Neurogenic pain- nerve pain such as trigeminal neuralgia, a disease that causes severe pain in the face.
 - Psychogenic pain- pain not associated with disease or injury but from the brain

Major Types of Pain Management

- Medication prescribed by a doctor is the best treatment for pain. There are non drug treatments that caregivers can use.
- Mild exercise helps to increase flexibility and strength, relieving muscle stress that can cause backaches, headaches, and fatigue.
- Warm or cool compresses applied to a painful area can bring temporary relief for headache, backache and arthritis.
- Massage is useful for back pain, but any painful area that is red or swollen should not be massaged until a doctor has evaluated the problem.