

# Managing Short-Term Pain at Home

## WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER?

Have the person(s) caring for you call your healthcare provider right away if you:

- Can't stay awake or are hard to wake up
- Have more pain, or pain that you can't tolerate
- Feel numbness, tingling, or weakness where you don't expect it
- Feel sick to your stomach or are vomiting
- Are constipated
- Have itching or a skin rash
- Are dizzy, feel lightheaded, or have fainted
- Have a fever
- Have ringing, buzzing, or a whistling sound in your ears
- Have a metallic taste in your mouth
- Have numbness or tingling around your mouth and lips
- Feel coolness, tightness, or pain around an incision
- Have blurred vision
- Have redness, swelling, or drainage around a catheter

Call 911 right away if you have trouble breathing, or they can't wake you up.

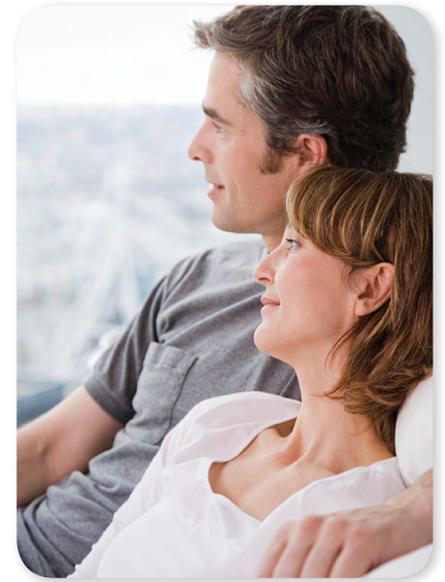
### LEFTOVER MEDICATION?

Don't keep leftover medication around the house. Find out where to take them at [useonlyasdirected.org](http://useonlyasdirected.org).

## Why pain management is important

Successful pain management doesn't always mean taking away your pain completely. Good pain management allows your body and mind to focus on healing. As you and your healthcare providers manage your pain, you can expect to:

- **Be able to move around more easily.** If you feel less pain, you can start to do therapy exercises (such as walking or breathing exercises) that will help you get your strength back more quickly.
- **Have fewer complications.** People whose pain is well controlled seem to do better after a medical procedure or injury. They have fewer problems like pneumonia and blood clots because they are able to do therapy exercises.
- **Feel less stress.** Feeling comfortable reduces the stress that comes with pain. Less stress means both your mind and body can work harder on healing.



## Talking with your healthcare providers

Call your healthcare providers if your pain gets worse or it doesn't get better. They may need to change your medication. When you call, they'll want to know how much pain you're feeling. They'll also ask you to describe the pain. Here are some ways you might describe it:

- Where does it hurt? *It hurts in my shoulder, hip, knee, back, neck, thigh, etc.*
- When does it hurt? *It comes and goes, or, it hurts all the time.*
- What does it feel like? *It feels sharp, dull, aching, throbbing, like pins and needles, like burning, etc.*
- What level is your pain? *My pain is at a level 8, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is the worst pain ever.)*
- What makes it feel worse? *It feels worse when I stand, sit, lie down, walk, sleep, eat, read, get dressed, etc.*

## Pain relief medication

Your healthcare provider may give you one or more prescriptions for pain medication. There are many different pain medications, and they control pain in different ways. These are 3 common types of pain medication:

- **Prescription pain pills.** These include opioid medications such as morphine, codeine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone, among others. These drugs are powerful, but can be safe and effective when used as directed. Opioid medications can cause various side effects. **Constipation** is the most common side effect. Drinking extra water and taking laxatives can help. Slow or **decreased breathing** is the most serious side effect, and it can kill you. Your risk is higher if you take too many pain pills or mix them with alcohol or street drugs. **Ask your caregivers to CALL 911 if you have decreased breathing or if they can't wake you up.**
- **Tylenol, or anti-inflammatory medications.** These may be over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), or prescription anti-inflammatories. You often take these on a different schedule than your other medication. Don't take Tylenol (acetaminophen) or any other medication with your prescriptions, unless your healthcare provider says it's okay.
- **LAID (local anesthetic infusion device).** This is a **pain pump**. It delivers numbing medication for a short time. Your healthcare provider will give you instructions on how to use it, and will remove it for you.

Whatever your pain medication, **use it ONLY as directed.** If your pain improves after the first few days, tell your healthcare provider. You may be able to take fewer doses.

## Tracking your medication

To prevent medication mistakes, don't use a pillbox for your pain medication. It's better that you and your caregivers write down when you take your medication and how much you take. This will help you know if you've taken your pills, and help keep you from taking too many. The chart below is an example of how you should track your medication:

MEDICATION	TIME	HOW MUCH?
<i>Example: Percocet</i>	<i>1:45 PM</i>	<i>1 tablet</i>

## Pain relief without medication

You may be able to take fewer doses of pain medication (or skip it completely with your healthcare provider's okay) when you use one of these other ways to relieve pain. Ask your healthcare provider which ones would be best for you.

- Cold or heat
- Guided imagery and distraction
- Physical therapy or exercise
- Relaxation or meditation
- Massage
- Spiritual or emotional counseling



### PAIN MEDICATION SAFETY

- **Don't take more medication than your healthcare provider tells you to.**
- **Never use alcohol or street drugs when taking opioid pain medications.** The combination can kill you.
- **Don't take your medications with any other pills unless your healthcare provider says it's okay.** This includes vitamins, herbs, or any other supplements that you usually take.
- **Don't drive or use any heavy machinery** until you know how the medication affects you.
- **Keep the medication in the bottle it came in.** The label has instructions and information you need.
- **Don't share your pain medication with anyone.** Don't give your pills to friends or family members, even if the person is in pain.
- **Lock up medication where it's safe.** Don't keep your pain pills in your medicine cabinet where anyone can find them. Ask your pharmacist where you can take any leftover pills, or see if you can take them to your local police department for disposal.