Managing Short-Term Pain at Home

Intermountain Health

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Have the person(s) caring for you **call 911 right away i**f you are having trouble breathing or they can't wake you up.

Call your healthcare provider right away if you:

- Experience an increase in pain, or pain that you can't tolerate
- Feel numbness, tingling, or weakness where you don't expect it
- Are throwing up often
- Can't have a bowel movement (poop)
- Develop itching or a skin rash
- Are dizzy, feel lightheaded, have blurred vision, or have fainted
- Have a fever greater than 101° F (38.3°C)
- Feel coolness, tightness, or pain around an incision
- Have redness, swelling, or drainage around your incision (surgical wound) or catheter

Leftover medication?

Visit knowyourscript.org or scan the code below with your phone to find out where you can safely dispose of any leftover medications.

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.** Research shows that well-controlled pain helps you do better after a medical procedure or injury. You are less likely to get pneumonia (a lung infection) or blood clots because you are able to move more and do your physical therapy.
- **Feel less stress.** Feeling comfortable reduces stress that comes with pain. Less stress means both your mind and body can work harder on healing.

Talking with your care team

Call your care team if your pain gets worse or it doesn't get better. Your doctor may need to change your medication. When you call, they will want to know how much pain you are feeling. They will 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 or pressure.
- **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 2 common types of pain medication:

- **Prescription opioid medications.** These include morphine, codeine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone, among others. These medications are powerful, but can be safe and effective when used as directed by your healthcare provider. Opioid medications should only be taken short term to address moderate to severe pain.

  Opioids can cause various side effects. Constipation is the most common side effect. Drinking extra water and taking a mild laxative can help. Slowed or decreased breathing is the most serious side effect and can result in death. Naloxone is a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose. It is available at most pharmacies without a prescription. Tell those caring for you to CALL 911 and use naloxone if you have decreased breathing and if they can't wake you up.

- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or anti-inflammatory medications.** These may be prescription anti-inflammatories like meloxicam or celecoxib, or over-the-counter medications like aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve). These may be taken on a different schedule. Take all medications exactly as directed by your provider.

  Dispose of any leftover medications at a drug collection site. Unused medications can be dangerous to leave around. You can find drop-off locations at **knowyourscript.org.** (Scan code on front of document.)

Tracking your medication

To prevent medication mistakes, don't use a pillbox for your pain medication. Instead, you and those caring for you should write down when you take your pain medication and how much you take. This will help you know that you have taken your medications 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?
Example: Percocet	*1:45 PM*	*1 tablet*

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 directs you to.
- Your risk is higher if you combine pain medications pain pills with alcohol or street drugs. Caregivers should call 911 if you become overly sedated or have trouble breathing.
- Don't take your pain medications with any other medication unless your healthcare provider says it's okay. This includes vitamins, herbs, or any other supplements that you usually take.
- Don't drive or any heavy machinery while taking opioid medication.
- 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 pain medications to friends or family members, even if the person is in pain.
- Lock up medication where it's safe. Don't keep your pain medications in your medicine cabinet where anyone can find them. Ask your pharmacist or scan the code on page 1 to see where you can safely dispose of any leftover medications.

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