

Managing Your Child's Pain

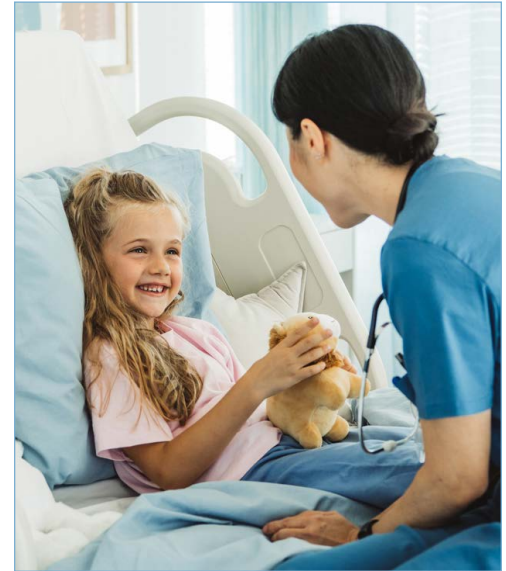
INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES



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If your child is sick, injured, has surgery, or has another medical procedure, they are likely to feel some pain. It's almost impossible to avoid. But a lot can be done to help your child feel better and heal well. This booklet will help you understand what you and your child may experience. It will show you ways you can work with your child's healthcare providers to manage your child's pain.



How you can help

While your child is recovering, their care team will do everything possible to control your child's pain and to help them feel safe and comfortable. You can do a lot to help, too. You are an important member of your child's healthcare team. While you are at your child's side, you may be the first one to notice changes. You can recognize your child's unique ways of showing pain and discomfort. You and your child's care team need to share information about what's happening. Here are some ways to work together.

How your child's care team helps

- Do everything possible to manage your child's pain and minimize side effects.
- Explain what kind of pain is involved when your child has a test or procedure, and explain how the pain will be treated.
- Explain the risks, benefits, and side effects of your child's pain medications.
- Listen when you or your child report pain.
- Assess your child's pain regularly, and respond quickly when you or your child report pain.
- Remain committed to managing your child's pain.

How you can help

- Stay near your child when possible. If you can't be there, ask someone your child knows to stay with them.
- Talk with the care team about the treatments your child is receiving and what they may experience. Ask about the options.
- Look for signals that your child's pain may be returning, changing, or not improving. Look for changes in your child's behavior or appearance.
- **Speak up.** You are not being a bother. Ask about anything that doesn't seem right to you.
- Tell us how your child normally finds comfort. Do they suck their right thumb? Do they like to be rocked?



What else might be upsetting my child?

In addition to physical pain, your child may feel emotional stresses. These can include:

- **Fear about current and future pain**, and whether she'll get better. Some children may fear the medical equipment in the room.
- **Stress caused by trying to be brave**, or by worrying about family members.
- **Confusion about being away from home**, in a strange place, and with unfamiliar people.
- **Too much stimulation** from the lights, sounds, smells, and activity of a hospital.

When possible, talk to your child about these feelings. Try to keep the room calm and quiet and the lights dim.

What makes it hurt?

Your child's pain can be caused by a number of things, such as:

- The condition they are being treated for
- Injury
- Bruising
- Trauma
- Stress or anxiety
- A surgical cut
- Muscle spasms or cramps
- Tubes inserted into the body during or after the procedure
- Muscle pain from lying in a certain position during the procedure, or from lying in bed for a long time afterward
- Air or blood in the stomach or chest
- Constipation and gas

As your child's body begins to heal, their pain should decrease. How quickly it decreases depends in part on how well the pain is managed. Your child's general health and other medical conditions may also influence the speed of their recovery.

How will my child respond to pain?

A child's age and understanding of pain can affect how they act and feel. Every child is different, but these are some common ways children may respond to pain.

Newborns (0 to 3 months). A newborn may:

- Cry a lot, even when being comforted.
- Grunt, groan, or hiccup.
- Clench their fists or spread their fingers wide.
- Bring their hands up near their mouth.
- Have trouble sleeping or staying awake.
- Startle easily.
- Pull away from touch, make jerky movements, or arch their back when being held

Infants and toddlers (1 to 3 years). An infant or toddler may:

- Want to be held more often than usual.
- Be upset when separated from you.
- Lose interest in favorite toys or activities.
- Have trouble finding words to describe the pain.
- Point to the place that hurts.
- Under severe pain, they may thrash, hit themselves, or become very upset.

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years) A preschooler may:

- Have difficulty understanding why they are hurting or when the pain will end.
- Think the pain is a punishment for something they did wrong.
- Make up reasons for why they are in pain.
- Act out themes of illness, injury, or the hospital during play.

Playing out these experiences can help them understand and cope with what is happening.

School-age children (5 to 12 years). A school-age child may:

- Understand simple explanations about what is causing the pain and how long it might last.
- Be able to tell you where it hurts and how much it hurts.
- Try to be brave and hide their pain.
- Sometimes describe their pain as worse than it is.
- Worry that medical treatments could permanently change their body.

Teenagers (12 to 18 years). A teenager may:

- Worry about losing control over what is happening to them. Be afraid that something serious could happen because of the pain.
- Try to be brave and keep their pain to themselves. Feel uncomfortable talking about their body or describing their pain.
- Think that others should know how they feel without being told.
- Feel alone or believe that no one else has experienced the same pain.

Remember, every child experiences pain differently. Your child may show some of these behaviors, all of them, or none at all. Listening, offering comfort, and reassuring your child can help them feel safer and more supported

Your child's responses to pain

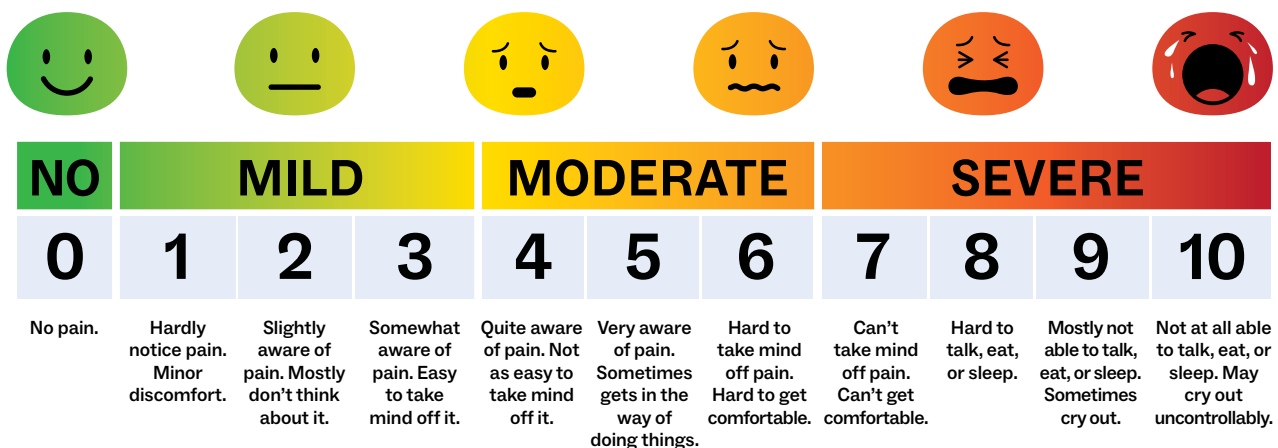
These are responses to pain you might see in a child of any age:

- **Increased demand for attention** and increased crying.
- **Regression.** Your child may return to behaviors of a younger child.
- **Sleep difficulties.** They may be afraid to sleep alone, be more afraid of the dark, or have nightmares or night terrors.
- **Anxiety.** Your child may be watching out all the time for something painful or scary to happen.
- **Fear of strangers** or distrust of people they don't know, especially healthcare workers.
- **Nervous behaviors** such as scratching, picking, or nail biting.
- **Eating problems.** They may not want to eat.
- **Anger.** They may get angry about things that normally don't bother them.
- **Concern about their body** and more fear or curiosity about death.

How much does it hurt?

To treat your child's pain, the care team needs to understand how much pain your child is feeling. Different tools can help with this. The tool used will depend on your child's age and ability to understand and communicate.

- **A behavioral scale**, called the FLACC scale, can help rate the pain of a child who cannot speak. A care provider will rate your child's pain by watching your child's face, legs, activity, crying, and how easily they can be consoled.
- **With the Intermountain Pain Assessment Tool shown below**, a child who is alert can say or point to the face that shows how much pain they are feeling and can rate their own pain on a scale from 0 to 10.
- If your child is able, their care providers may also ask them to describe their pain. They will want to know these things about it:
 - **Where does it hurt?** "It hurts in my tummy, arm, knee. The pain moves around."
 - **When does it hurt?** "It hurts just sometimes. It hurts all the time."
 - **What does it feel like?** "It feels sharp like a knife. It's pounding. It burns. It feels like pins and needles."
 - **What makes it feel worse?** "Sitting up makes it feel worse. It hurts more when I'm talking or swallowing. It hurts more when my mom goes away or there are too many people in the room."
 - **What makes it feel better?** "I feel better when I shut my eyes and hold my blankie. Playing a video game makes me feel better. I feel better when I'm watching TV."



What is a pain management goal?

Pain treatment may not take away all of your child's pain. The goal is to reduce pain enough so your child can rest and do the things they need to recover. Your child's healthcare team will work with you to set a pain management goal. This goal helps everyone know if the pain treatment is working well enough

A pain management goal has 3 parts:

1 Your child's comfort. Your child should be as comfortable as possible. This includes:

- Staying warm
- Not feeling sick to their stomach or throwing up
- Having access to the things that help them feel calm and secure

Every child is different. Comfort may include sucking their thumb, using a pacifier, cuddling a favorite toy, or being close to family.

2 Your child's ability to recover. To heal, your child needs to be able to do certain activities. Depending on their age and condition, these may include:

- Walking or crawling
- Coughing
- Taking deep breaths
- Eating and drinking
- Sleeping and resting

3 Your child's pain score. Your child's care team will use a pain scale to measure your child's pain. They will consider whether your child can do the things they need to do to recover at that pain level. For example:

- Can your child keep food down without throwing up?
- Can they walk, move around, or take deep breaths?

Finding the right goal

Every child experiences pain differently and is comforted by different things. Many children can rest, move, and recover well with a pain score of 2, 3, or 4. The pain level that allows your child to be comfortable and do what they need to do becomes their pain management goal.

If your child is not comfortable enough to rest, eat, move, or do other activities that help them recover, their care team may adjust their pain treatment plan.





What if my child's pain isn't controlled?

Many pain medications don't get rid of *all* the pain, but can help reduce it to a more comfortable level. The goal is to find the most pain relief with the fewest side effects and risks.

If the medication is not controlling your child's pain, tell your healthcare provider. The doctor may try to find another method of pain management, or may ask for the advice of a pain specialist. If you feel your child's needs are not being met, you can ask for the opinion of another doctor.

How will my child's pain be treated?

When your child is in pain, it's important to do everything possible to help. This includes both medical treatments, like giving medication, and non-medical comforts, like playing soft music or holding her hand. You and your child's healthcare providers can work together to find the best pain management plan for your child.

Medications

Pain medications are designed to control the feelings of pain in all or part of your child's body. Especially at the beginning, most pain medications may control some or most of the pain, but not all of it. With time, medications should be able to control more of the pain.

Your child may also be given medications to help control her fear and worry. Being able to relax will allow her body to focus more on healing physically.

How is pain medication given?

Your child's pain medication can be delivered in the following ways:

- As a pill or a liquid
- As an injection
- Through an IV
- Through an inhaler or spray
- As a cream or a patch

Other kinds of pain medication are used for specific purposes. Your healthcare providers can tell you more about them.

Can my child get addicted?

When used for pain and under the care of a trained provider, there is very little risk of addiction to pain medications. Taking medications right on schedule is an important way to make sure they're safe.

What else can comfort my child?

In addition to medications, your child needs love and understanding from you and other caregivers. Here are some things that might help them feel better.

- **Talk with your child.** Be honest with your child and prepare them for what may be happening next. Let them make choices whenever possible.
- **Touch your child.** Rubbing your child's back, arms, legs, or feet may take their mind off the pain. If your child can't move on their own, change their position from time to time. If medical equipment is in the way, ask if it can be moved.
- **Apply cold or heat.** Cold packs can reduce swelling and help with short-term pain. Warmth can soothe aching muscles and stiff joints. Ask the care team for direction before using cold or heat.
- **Help your child think about something else.** Ask your child to describe their favorite place, using all their senses. What does it look like? What do they smell, hear, or taste there? How does it feel?
- **Help your child relax.** Deep breathing and relaxation exercises can help your child relax and feel better. The care team can give you ideas about this.
- **Distract your child with music or games.** Play your child's favorite music. Sing to your child or have them sing. Let them play a handheld electronic game.



Don't forget your child's "best friend"

Does your child have a favorite blanket, stuffed animal, or toy? What about a hat from their favorite sports team or musical artist? Make sure you bring these things to the hospital (and put their name on them). Having these things nearby can help your child feel loved, understood, and remain connected with life outside the hospital.

Helping your child manage pain at home

Give medications just as the doctor prescribes.

Treat nausea. Some pain medications cause nausea and vomiting. Ask your doctor or nurse how to introduce foods in a way that prevents nausea.

Feed your child healthy foods. Start with simple foods such as cooked cereal, applesauce, and toast. Greasy foods (such as hamburgers or fries) can cause nausea.

Treat constipation. Encourage your child to drink fluids and eat high-fiber foods such as whole-grain bread.

Keep a normal routine. Help your child wake up, eat, bathe, and do what they can at the normal time.

Balance activity and rest. Help balance between normal activity and the rest needed for recovery.

Maintain the rules. Have your child keep the normal rules of your household. Have them do what is normally expected.

Spend time together. As your child gets better and you move back into your normal routine, be sure to make time to be together and talk about what they are going through.

What about me?

Taking care of a sick child is tiring, especially when you have other responsibilities at home. It's important to take care of yourself so you'll have the energy to take care of your child. Whenever possible, try to do these things:

- **Keep your normal routine.** Try to sleep, eat, and do other things at the times you normally do.
- **Eat well.** Even if your child can't eat, you still need to. You just may not want to eat in front of them. Eat healthy foods that will build your strength.
- **Find someone to help with other responsibilities.** Ask a friend or family member to help cook, run errands, or do other things that may be hard to get to.
- **Take a break now and then.** Remember to get out of the house and do something for yourself now and then. It may help you feel stronger and more able to care for your child.

When should I call my child's provider?

Once you're home, your child should be starting to feel better. If they don't or if you see new symptoms, there may be something happening that their care provider needs to know about.

Call if your child:

- Has pain that does not get better, or gets worse
- Is too sleepy
- Is not making sense when they talk
- Is vomiting a lot
- Itches
- Has trouble urinating (peeing)
- Has any other symptoms that worry you



Where can I learn more?

You can find these materials, as well as links to other helpful information at the links below:

- intermountainhealthcare.org/childrens-health/dysautonomia-pain-recovery



- kidshealth.org/PrimaryChildrens/en/

