

Managing Pain after a Surgical Procedure:

Why is pain management 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?
- When does it hurt?
- What does it feel like? Achy, tender, burning, cramping, sharp, dull, stabbing, tingling, etc..
- What level of pain are you having?
- What makes it feel worse? Or better?

Tracking your Medication Usage:

To prevent medication mistakes, don't use a pillbox for your pain medication. It is 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 also help keep you from taking too many. The chart below is an example of how you should track your medication usage:

| MEDICATION | TIME | HOW MUCH? |
|-------------------|---------|-----------|
| Example: Percocet | 1:45 PM | 1 tablet |
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Pain relief without using medication:

You may be able to take fewer doses of your pain medication when you utilize alternative ways to relieve your pain. Ask your healthcare provider which ones may be best for you to try.

- Cold or Heat:
 - Heat can decrease the stiffness in your muscles and help to relax them. Ice can also be used to decrease pain and swelling, and to dull sensitive or painful areas on your body. Ask your provider before trying hot or cold therapy.
- Guided imagery and distraction:
 - Thinking about pleasant things can provide a distraction to take your mind off the pain you may be feeling.
- Physical therapy or exercise:
 - Your provider will let you know if physical therapy or exercise will be right for you after surgery. Often times, moving about and keeping active within your limitations after surgery can help you to heal faster and regain your strength.
- Relaxation or meditation:
 - Having surgery can be a very stressful event. Try closing your eyes and taking slow deep breaths or meditate to provide you comfort. Your family can help you with this relaxation technique by keeping your environment quiet and as stress free as possible.
- Massage:
 - A gentle comforting massage can help relax your body and lessen your pain. A simple back rub by a friend or family member or gentle hand massage can relax your body and distract it from pain.
- Spiritual or emotional counseling

Prescription Opioids:

What you need to know

Prescription opioids are medicines used to help relieve severe pain. They are often prescribed after a surgery or injury, or for certain health problems. Some common opioid medicines are **codeine, hydrocodone, methadone, morphine, and oxycodone.**

These medicines can be an important part of treatment. They also come with serious risks. It's important to work with your healthcare provider to make sure you are getting the safest, most effective care.

If you are prescribed opioids for pain:

- Be informed.** Keep your prescription in the bottle it came in. Make sure you know:
 - The name of your medicine
 - How much to take
 - How often to take it
 - Side effects to watch out for, and when to call your doctor
- Don't take more pain medicine than your healthcare provider tells you to.** Don't take it more often than they tell you to.
- Follow up** with your primary healthcare provider.
 - Work together to create a plan on how to manage your pain.
 - Talk about ways to help manage your pain that don't involve prescription opioids.
 - Talk about your concerns and side effects.



Make sure you know the name of your medicine, how much you should take, how often to take it, and its potential risks and side effects.

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist** if you should get a naloxone kit. This can save your life if you have an accidental overdose.
- Help prevent misuse and abuse.**
 - Never sell or share prescriptions opioids.
 - Never use another person's prescriptions opioids.
- Lock up prescription opioids** in a safe place and out of reach of others. This may include visitors, children, friends, and family. Don't keep them in your medicine cabinet where anyone can find them.

Know your options:

Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to manage your pain without opioids. Other methods may actually work better and have fewer risks and side effects. Options may include:

- Other pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen
- Physical therapy and exercise
- Working with a therapist to help learn ways to change the triggers of pain and stress
- Some medicines that are also used for depression or seizures

What are the risks and side effects?

The biggest risks of prescription opioids are **addiction and overdose**. Risks are higher when you use them for a long time. An opioid overdose can cause slowed breathing and sudden death.

- Prescription opioids can have side effects, even when taken as directed. These include:
- Constipation - this is the most common side effect
- Tolerance - the need to take more medicine for the same pain relief
- Physical dependence - having symptoms of withdrawal when you stop taking them
- Greater sensitivity to pain
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Low levels of testosterone, which can lead to lower sex drive, energy, and strength
- Itching and sweating

Risks are greater if you:

- Have a history of drug misuse, substance abuse disorder, or overdose
- Are taking sedatives or you drink alcohol when taking prescription opioids
- Have a mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety
- Have sleep apnea
- Have a disability (increases your risk for falls)
- Are age 65 or older, are confused, have dementia or another mental disability
- Are pregnant

While you are taking prescription opioids:

- Never use alcohol or street drugs. Taking them together can kill you.
- Unless your doctor specifically says it is okay, do not take any of these medications:
 - Benzodiazepines (such as Zanax or Valium)
 - Muscle relaxants (such as Soma or Flexeril)
 - Sleeping pills (such as Ambien or Lunesta)
 - Other prescription opioids
- Don't take any other pills or vitamins unless your doctors says it is okay.
- Don't drive or use machinery when impaired by opioid medication.

Safely dispose of unused prescription opioids:

Find your community drug collection site at UseOnlyAsDirected.org to safely dispose of any leftover prescription opioids. It is best not to flush medications in the toilet as they can contaminate the water supply.