

Pain is a feeling that can be triggered in the nervous system as a result of injury, illness or emotional distress. Pain may be sharp or dull; it may come and go, or it may be constant. Pain is typically a symptom of an underlying issue and is not a normal part of aging.

Pain management is a medical specialty that combines alternative therapies with traditional medical care to provide care and comfort to people with pain. Pain management care is typically customized for each person in cooperation with a healthcare treatment team.

There are two types of pain:

1. **Acute pain** is discomfort that exists for a short time (usually less than three months) that can be controlled or eliminated with pain medication.
2. **Chronic pain** is on-going discomfort that typically lasts three to six months or longer. It can negatively affect physical and social wellbeing and limit professional success. The emotional stress of chronic pain also can lead to depression and worsen the perception of the pain. The body's defense system (its immune system) may also weaken, potentially leading to infection and illness.

## Diagnosing Pain

A doctor can diagnose pain during a physical exam by asking about past illnesses and overall health. It is important for a doctor to consider the exact words a person uses to describe the pain during an evaluation. A pain scale is often used to rate the severity of the pain. This is an example of a numeric rating scale:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1-10 with 0 being no pain, 5 being moderate pain and 10 being the worst pain you've ever experienced, how would you rate your current pain?

The doctor may also:

- evaluate the nervous system
- conduct blood tests
- ask questions to evaluate mood, mental health, memory and the ability to think clearly.

When test results are normal (as is commonly the case), it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of the pain. However, normal test results do not mean the pain doesn't exist; it simply means that individuals experience and deal with pain differently, which adds to the difficulty of finding the source in some cases.

### Treatment

1. Pain treatment typically falls under four categories:
2. Medications -- over-the-counter and prescription drugs
3. Physical therapy
4. Surgery
5. Alternative Therapy -- any treatment or intervention used in place of conventional medicine, such as:
  - Meditation
  - Hypnosis
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Acupuncture
  - Lifestyle changes
  - Chiropractic treatment
  - Yoga
  - Biofeedback
  - Aromatherapy
  - Herbal remedies

When conventional medicine is used in conjunction with alternative therapies, it is called complementary medicine. It is important that the network's clients work with a medical professional to help determine the best pain management treatment plan for each individual case.

### Caring for Someone with Chronic Pain

If your client says she is in pain, it is essential that you believe her. People experiencing pain are the only ones who know the extent of the pain. Pain is whatever the person experiencing it says it is, and it exists whenever he or she says it does. If people with pain think others do not believe them, they likely will become upset and may stop reporting the pain accurately, which makes managing pain more difficult.

### What You Can Do to Help

- **Ask about the pain.** No medical test can confirm if someone is in pain. The best way to find out is to ask. A good way of asking is to say, “How bad is your pain right now on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you’ve ever had?” Don’t contradict or argue about the rating you get.
- **Listen for words other than “pain.”** Clients may use different words to describe their pain, such as “discomfort,” “soreness” or “ache.”
- **Watch for behavior or body language that could be a response to pain.** A client may be unwilling to report pain or unable to communicate about pain in words. Some signs that may indicate a person is in pain include:
  - Agitation
  - Anger
  - Apathy
  - Bracing
  - Change in demeanor or behavior
  - Changes in activity level
  - Facial grimaces
  - Guarding
  - Resistance to movement
  - Restlessness
  - Rubbing
  - Sleeplessness
  - Wincing
  - Withdrawing
  - Moaning
  - Crying
  - Breathing and sighing heavily
- **Report your client’s pain symptoms to your franchise office if:**
  - there is no relief after taking pain medicine as prescribed or, in the case of over-the-counter pain medications, in accordance with the dosage requirements
  - there is some relief, but pain is still present after taking pain medicine
  - pain appears in new locations or there is new pain when moving or sitting
  - there are adverse side effects to pain medicines
  - you notice any changes in the client’s condition
  - there are changes in the client’s ability to walk or perform other activities due to pain
  - you notice changes in sleep patterns
  - your client can no longer cope with the pain

- **Be prepared to answer these questions when you call:**

- How long has the pain been a problem?
- Is it a new pain or has it happened before?
- Where is the pain located? Is it occurring in more than one area? If so, which location is most bothersome?
- How severe is the pain? Ask the client to rate the pain on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = no pain, 5 = moderate pain, 10 = worst pain ever experienced.
- What does the pain feel like? Ask the client to describe the pain. Use the exact words the client uses to describe the pain in your report.
- Is there any numbness or tingling?
- How does the pain interfere with doing normal activities? What activities or conditions make the pain worse?
- What has the client done to relieve the pain?
- Do you have a list of your client's medications? Are the medications taken at set times or when needed? Is the client allergic to or sensitive to any pain medicine?

- **You may be able to help reduce your client's pain by:**

- Positioning the client comfortably with pillows and soft seat cushions
- Encouraging the client to relax. Breathing slowly and quietly helps the mind and body relax, which can decrease pain
- Providing pleasant activities to help the client focus on something other than the pain
- Avoiding stressful situations whenever possible
- Encouraging the client to always follow his or her doctor's orders regarding pain management

*Please note that the content included in this resource is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be and should not be construed or presented as being medical advice or a substitute for receiving professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. You should always encourage your clients to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified medical provider for any questions they or their loved ones may have regarding a medical condition.*

### Sources:

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<http://www.healthinaging.org/resources/resource:eldercare-at-home-pain/> (Accessed 5/13/14)