



Helping you manage your pain

A fact sheet for people who are living with pain

Why you should seek assistance from a health-care professional when you are in pain?

Uncontrolled pain is a common problem. Pain can affect anyone at any age. If you are experiencing uncontrolled pain it can affect day-to-day activities and make you feel upset or sad. Members of your family may feel helpless too, especially if they do not know how to help.

The right to access the best pain management possible.

The Canadian Pain Society states that people have the right to receive the best possible pain management. If you are in pain, there are many resources you can turn to for help. Nurses and other health-care professionals are available to help find the best way to relieve or manage your pain.

There are different ways to do this based on the type of pain (procedural pain, acute, persistent) you may be experiencing. Nurses and other health-care professionals use the following principles:

- Pain is unique and different for each person.
- Pain that continues after treatment must be assessed by health-care professionals to identify the best possible way to manage the person's pain.
- People experiencing pain and their families need to be involved in decisions about the care and management of pain.
- A variety of health-care professionals may be involved in the assessment and management of pain, especially if the person's pain is complex.

When should you speak to a health-care professional about your pain?

Pain is often easier to control in the early stages before it becomes intense. Pain can be described in many ways such as soreness, discomfort, throbbing, sharp or a dull ache. If you are experiencing pain, tell your nurse, doctor or any health-care professional right away.

The first steps in managing pain:

You are the best person to describe your pain. When you have told a health-care professional that you are in pain, be prepared to talk about:

- **Location:** Where are you having pain? Do you feel the pain in more than one place? Does the pain move from one place to another?
- **Description:** How would you describe the pain (e.g., aching, sharp)? What makes the pain feel better or worse, such as when you move around or rest? Does the pain stop you from doing day-to-day activities? Does it interfere with sleep, your mood or your appetite? Does your pain affect your behaviour and relationships with others?
- **Duration and Frequency:** When does your pain start? How long does it last? How often does it occur?
- **Intensity:** How would you rate your pain? Some scales have numbers or words such as '0=no pain' to '10=worst pain' or pictures of faces to describe the intensity of pain, or if using a number scale such as 0-10, 1-3=mild, 4-6 =moderate and 7-10=severe pain.
- **Treatment:** What do you do to ease your pain? Do you take any pain medication prescribed or not prescribed by your doctor or nurse practitioner? Do you take any herbal remedies or other types of medication not prescribed but bought from the store? How long have you been taking them? What dose? How often? How well do they relieve the pain? What else do you use to ease the pain such as heat, massage; relaxing music or acupuncture?
- **Goals:** What would help you manage or control the pain?

Often family members may need to be involved to help the nurse and health-care professionals gather information to assess your pain especially if you are not able to communicate.

What happens next?

Your answers and the results from the physical exam and any other tests will help health-care professionals work with you to develop the best pain plan possible. The plan may include medication and other forms of treatment such as massage, physiotherapy, heat or cold therapy and strategies such as relaxation and distraction. You will be asked if your pain is controlled or improving with the treatment. Frequent checks by health-care professionals helps them to assess if the pain management plan is working or needs to be changed.

This fact sheet is developed as a supplement to RNAO's Nursing Best Practice Guideline document for nurses. Its aim is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Assessment and Management of Pain*, is available for public viewing and free download at <http://RNAO.ca/bpg>.