

## Managing Your Pain

At Northwestern Memorial Hospital, it is important to us that you are as comfortable as possible. Pain can be relieved most of the time. Good pain relief can help you be more active and help you in your recovery.

*It is important to let your doctors and nurses know when you are in pain.*

### What can I do to get good pain relief?

- Talk to your doctors and nurses about your pain. We cannot always tell when you are having pain. Therefore, it is important to let your doctors and nurses know when you are in pain.
- Point to where the pain is located.
- Describe how the pain feels: aching, throbbing or burning. There may be many ways to describe your pain.
- Rate your pain on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning no pain and 10 the worst pain you could imagine.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**No Pain**

**Moderate Pain**

**Worst Pain**



0

2

4

6

8

10

- List pain medicines you have taken in the past and how well they have worked for you.
- Tell your doctor and nurse how well your current pain medicine is working.

## What medicines are used to relieve pain?

Many different medicines can be used to treat pain. The choice of a medicine is based upon your type of pain. In general, there are 3 types of pain medicines:

- **Nonopioids.** These medications include acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin and ibuprofen, also called Motrin® or Advil®. Some of these medicines are available without a prescription. Common medicines taken with prescription medicines or in large doses, can cause serious side-effects such as bleeding and liver damage. Be certain to ask your doctor before taking any medicines that have not been prescribed.
- **Opioids.** Sometimes called “narcotics,” these medicines are used for moderate to severe pain. Narcotics may make you drowsy. Do not drive a car or other vehicles or use dangerous equipment. Avoid alcohol use.
- **Other medicines.** These medicines are used for other problems, but are useful in relieving pain. For example, some anti-seizure drugs and antidepressants can reduce pain. Local anesthetics, such as Novocaine®, often can be helpful. Steroids can be used for some types of pain. Side effects vary with each medicine. Talk with your doctor about what to expect and which side effects should be reported.

## How should I take my pain medicines?

Instructions will be given to you about your pain medicines. Pain medicines can be taken as a pill or liquid. These can be just as powerful as injections. Oral pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, and anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen, should be taken with a full glass of water to speed up their action and to reduce side-effects. Most oral pain medicine begins working in 20 to 30 minutes, with full effect noted in about 1 to 2 hours. If you cannot swallow or your stomach cannot digest well, medicines can be given by injection IV (into the vein) or in the skin (subcutaneous). Other methods also are available.

## When should I take my pain medicines?

It is best to take your pain medicines before the pain becomes severe. Once pain becomes severe, it is more difficult to relieve. Many people find it helpful to take pain medicines before walking or other activities that may trigger pain. This prevents the pain before it starts. When pain is constant, medicines may be given on a regular schedule to keep the pain under control.

## Are there side-effects to pain medicines?

All medicines have side-effects, but not all people get them. Most side-effects happen in the first few hours of treatment and slowly go away. These might include nausea and vomiting, sleepiness and constipation. Your doctors and nurses can give you medicines to prevent or treat these side-effects.

## Are there other ways to relieve pain?

Many people find that cold packs, heating pads and massage help reduce pain. Music or television may distract you from the pain. Relaxation exercises can be helpful.

If you are in the hospital, relaxation videos can be found through the Northwestern Memorial On-Demand System and include *Relaxing Through the Seasons*, access title No. 122. This video guides you through 5 easy relaxation exercises. *Rhythmic Medicine*, title No. 121, uses nature scenes and calming music to help ease stress. Your nurse can help you access these videos.

These are some of the most commonly asked questions about pain. Remember, the doctors, nurses and other staff members at Northwestern Memorial care about your comfort. If you have other questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

## Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to [hlc@nmh.org](mailto:hlc@nmh.org).

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at [www.nmh.org](http://www.nmh.org).

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar a el departamento de representantes para pacientes al 312-926-3112.*

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Developed by: Pain Task Force

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