

How to Manage Pain in Children

Your Child's Right to Pain Management

All patients have a right to receive treatment for pain. Treating pain is an important part of care and recovery. Your child has the right to appropriate assessment and management of pain.

What Causes a Child's Pain?

- IV (intravenous) insertion
- blood tests
- achiness from fever
- incisions after surgery
- rashes, cuts, or sores
- tubes pulling at their skin
- sore muscles.

What are Signs That Your Child is in Pain?

Children might not be able to tell adults where they have pain, and how it feels. They might not be able to communicate, or they might not feel comfortable communicating.

Some children under-report how bad their pain is because they may be afraid of what may happen if they reveal their pain.

Sometimes it is helpful to rate your child's pain on a scale, such as the Wong-Baker FACES® Pain Rating Scale (back side).

Adults need to be aware of possible ways that children might cope with pain and look for other signs that a child is in pain:

- faster than normal heartbeat
- faster than normal breathing.

Toddlers may:

- tell you about the pain
- cry or grimace
- hold their bodies rigid
- become easily frustrated or irritable
- act out with aggression
- move restlessly or not sleep well.

Preschool-aged children may also:

- refuse to let you touch the area
- have nightmares
- hesitate to admit pain if they view it as punishment and fear the treatment.

School-aged children can talk more directly about the cause, type and amount of pain.

Common behaviors include:

- holding still or guarding the area
- not smiling
- not making eye contact
- withdrawing emotionally or becoming irritable
- becoming restless or thrashing about
- sleeping more than usual
- having nightmares.

(over)

Teenagers may show a combination of adult and childlike behavior. Look for:

- changes in activity levels
- being uncooperative
- changes in eating/sleeping habits
- irritability or restlessness.

What Can You Do?

Parents know their children best. You can help the health care providers make decisions about relieving your child's pain.

- Be present, or ask others to visit.
- Tell staff if you think your child's pain is not being relieved.
- Give your child some control over his or her environment. This will help reduce what's making the pain worse.

What Else Can be Done to Reduce Your Child's Pain?

Pain is both a physical and a mental state. Children may ask themselves why they hurt, and they may blame themselves. They might also have anxiety. Some things that may help:

- Explain what will happen so your child knows what to expect.
- Use a soothing voice, or music to distract your child.
- Rock your child, or use slow, calming massage.
- Encourage relaxation techniques, such as slow breathing.

Medicines

There are many types of pain medicines that your child can take. The type that is best for your child will depend on the type of pain, how long it lasts, and the reasons for your child's pain.



If your child takes prescription pain medicine, he or she may have some side effects, which can include itching, nausea or constipation. Prescription pain medicine might also slow your child's breathing.

If your child is constipated, he or she may drink more fluids and may need to take a stool softener.

When Your Child Goes Home

After your child goes home, please carefully read and follow your health care provider's instructions about pain medicines. You may be directed to give these medicines on a schedule, even if the pain seems mild. It is often easier to prevent pain from getting worse than it is to decrease pain once it becomes severe.

Giving your child medicine before sleep may help him or her sleep better. Some medicines may need to be given at different hours of the night and day. Your health care provider will give you a medicine schedule for your child.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- the pain medicine is not working
- your child's pain is getting worse
- your child has signs of an allergic reaction to pain medicines, such as a rash or trouble breathing.