

Pain

Helping your child with pain

You know your child best. We encourage you to take an active part in your child's recovery by talking with your care team about how your child expresses pain.



Did you know?

- Babies can feel pain.
- Children can communicate and describe their pain.
- Addiction rarely occurs when strong medicines (narcotics) are used for pain.

Will my child have pain?

Your child may feel pain from surgery, injury, disease, procedures (such as needle pokes) or the side effects of treatment. Sometimes pain is brief (acute) or may last a long time (chronic). There are many ways to reduce pain and provide support.

What makes pain worse?

Sadness, fear and worry can make pain worse. Pain can also increase when a child feels a lack of control, is tired, or is in a strange new place without their family. We will work with you to prepare for and manage painful events to reduce the emotional effects on your child.

How will my child show pain?

Every child reacts differently to pain. Your child may be quiet and less active or restless and easily angered. They may lose their appetite or change sleep patterns. Talk with your child's nurse or doctor about how your child shows pain and what seems to help.

We are watching for pain.

Your child's pain will be checked often using a scoring system. We will be watching to see how their pain changes over time and responds to treatment. You can also use these scales at home to measure your child's pain.

How will my child's pain be treated?

We will use medicine and non-medicine strategies to treat your child's pain. Because pain is complex, it is best to use several methods at the same time.

Medicines

It is important to keep on top of pain. This means treating pain early. Ask your child about their pain when you first see signs of mild pain before it becomes too severe. It is best to give pain medicine regularly.

For example:

- After surgery, pain medicine often is ordered every few hours. This schedule might continue for 3 or 4 days after your child goes home, depending on your child's needs.
- If a procedure does not need to be done on an emergency basis, a numbing cream (LMX) can be put on the skin ahead of time. LMX may help reduce the pain of the poke. Another topical anesthetic is the J-tip, which is a system for delivering medicine through the skin without the use of needles. Both LMX and J-tip can be used for IV (intravenous) lines, blood tests, and port access. Ask your child's care team if you would like to learn more.
- Sedation may be recommended for select procedures. Talk with your child's care team.

We want to use medicine that is safe and effective.

The amount of pain medicine depends on your child's weight, type of pain and health. Medicine for mild pain is most often given by mouth. Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen are often used for this type of pain. They work very well to control pain, even pain after surgery. If these are not effective, we will prescribe a stronger type of pain medicine such as morphine or oxycodone.

A combination of medicines is often used to promote comfort. It is important to work with your care team to choose the pain medicines that will work best for your child. Even common over-the-counter medicines such as Tylenol or ibuprofen have the potential for interaction with certain prescriptions or medical conditions.

What is a PCA?

Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA) is also known as a “pain button.” It is a device that can be used by patients to give small, safe doses of pain medicine when they need it. This allows the child to control their pain with fewer side effects. Patients with this device are usually more comfortable, even though they use less medication. For PCA to be safe, only the patient pushes the button. If a child is able to play a video game, they are usually old enough to use PCA.

What is regional analgesia?

Regional analgesia is a group of techniques used to provide pain control during and after some surgery. It uses medicine that ‘blocks’ the nerves from sending pain messages to the brain. This medicine needs to be put around the nerves, somewhere between the site of surgery and the brain. Often this will be done at the spine or in an arm or leg. Sometimes a single dose of medicine is used. Other times a small tube (catheter) will be placed to provide a constant dose of medicine to the nerve.

Will my child become addicted to pain medicine?

Many parents are concerned about the potential for addiction to pain medication. It is very rare that a patient becomes addicted to pain medicine when it is taken only for a short time. Some children who need long-term pain control may become tolerant (get used to the medicine) and need higher doses of pain medicine. When the pain improves, the dose of pain medicine is slowly reduced to prevent discomfort from withdrawal.

Will my child get sick from pain medicines?

All narcotic pain medicines may have side effects. These can include nausea, vomiting, itching, constipation and sleepiness. We want to promote the most comfort with the least amount of side effects. Medicines will be ordered to treat side effects if they occur.

Other strategies

In addition to medicine, there are many other ways to help relieve pain. These include:

- **Acupuncture:** Inserting hair-thin needles at specific points in the body to reduce pain and promote healing.
- **Acupressure:** Applying pressure on specific points on the body to control pain.
- **Art and music therapy:** Using art or music to provide distraction from pain or anxiety. Art and music therapy can facilitate communication, expression, and a sense of productivity and control.
- **Distraction:** A technique that takes a child’s attention away from pain.

- **Imagery:** Using your imagination and all of the senses to create a more pleasant experience.
- **Massage:** Applying pressure to the muscles and soft tissue to prevent and relieve pain and tension.
- **Reiki therapy:** A light touch therapy where hands are placed on specific points on your body to channel healing energy in order to treat pain.
- **Swaddling:** Wrapping a baby snugly in a blanket to help them feel calm and secure.
- **Therapeutic play:** The use of play to help express feelings or explain a medical procedure.
- **Therapeutic touch:** The process of energy exchange, during which the practitioner uses their hands close to the patient's body as a focus for facilitating healing.

How can I help my child with pain?

Support your child: be his or her coach, provide comfort and reassurance, and help discover what works best to give your child relief. It is helpful to:

- Respond promptly to your child's pain.
- Believe that your child is hurting.
- Emphasize the positive ways your child can help themselves relax.
- Tell your child what steps are being taken to make pain or symptoms better.
- Keep in mind that your child senses your anxiety. Seek support to decrease your own fears.
- Know that the job of pain control belongs to everyone involved with the care of your child. Talk with the nurses and doctors about how your child shows pain and what seems to help.
- Know that you may choose not to stay with your child during something painful, and the nurses will take good care of your child. If you choose to stay, you may ask for guidance on assuring and supporting your child.

What if my child loses control?

If your child starts becoming more anxious, you can:

- Speak softly to get his or her attention.
- Repeat simple words such as "look at me" or "listen to my voice."
- Try to keep your child's eye contact.
- Help him focus on breathing "slowly and evenly."
- Sometimes with younger children, having a small "surprise" toy can be helpful to capture their attention and calm them down.

More pain control tips

Here are some tips for helping your child with pain at different ages:

Babies:

- Talk to your baby in a quiet, calm voice.
- Hold and cuddle your baby. The nurses will show you some ways to hold your baby after surgery.
- Use pacifiers, music and mobiles to calm your baby.

Toddlers and Preschoolers – 1- to 5-year-olds:

- Tell your child if something is going to hurt. For example, for a shot you can say, “This may feel like a stick poking you or a little pinch. Let us know how it feels for you.”
- Don’t threaten your child with a shot. Your child will think it is a punishment, instead of something that will help.
- Have your child choose an activity that will help distract them from the pain. Pop-up books, counting and stories get your child’s mind on something else. Games, toys and sing-along songs are good when your child feels better. Giving choices helps him feel more in control.
- Teach your child to relax. Yawning, going limp like a rag doll, a back rub, imagining a favorite place can help relax tight muscles and reduce pain.
- Show your child how to breathe slowly and evenly. This can be very calming. Your child can blow a pinwheel or bubbles to see what a slow, deep breath can do.
- Let your child play with puppets, dolls or stuffed animals. This may help him show fears and feelings about the illness and hospital.
- Give your child something of yours to hold (like your watch) during a painful procedure if you are not going in with them. This will reassure them you will be right back.

School-age children and teens:

- Be honest. Tell your child if something is going to be uncomfortable.
- Give your child time to ask questions.
- Explain what is being done and why. Older children and teens need to understand and feel in control.
- Allow children to make choices whenever possible (would you like milk or juice to mix your medicine?)
- Teach your child to relax. Use deep breathing and imagery to relax tight muscles.
- Distract your child from the pain. Books, magazines and music get your child’s mind on something else. Bring a CD player and their favorite music to listen to during a painful test.

To Learn More

- Pain Medicine
206-987-2704
- Ask your child's
healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
206-987-2280 (TTY)

Caring for yourself

We know you feel your child's pain and need support, too. By taking good care of yourself, you will have more energy to give to your child.

- Be sure to ask questions.
- Find ways to help reduce your own stress.
- Get support from friends and family.

To learn more

Please talk to your child's doctor or nurse if you have questions or concerns about your child's pain. Ask your child's nurse about:

Child Life Services

Therapeutic play programs offer art, music and pet therapy. Child Life Specialists work with individual patients and families to help them reduce anxiety and adjust to being in the hospital. For referrals call 206-987-3285.

Complementary and Integrative Medicine

A program to help doctors and families mix, or integrate, complementary or non-medication methods with conventional treatment. This includes a wide range of practices, such as using herbs, acupuncture, therapeutic and healing touch, yoga and massage.

Family Resource Center

Staff can help families find information, make referrals and offer support. Located in the Train zone, 5th floor or call 206-987-2201.

Pain Medicine

A team of doctors and advance practice nurses that specialize in helping children with complex pain. Your child's care team can involve the pain management service when needed.