

# Pain Control: For Short-Term Acute Pain

*Tips to relieve your child's pain from a surgery or medical procedure*

## Learning to control your child's acute pain

Acute pain is short-lasting and gets better over time — like the pain right after a surgery. The following information suggests ways you and your Children's health care team can help control your child's pain due to surgery, medical procedures, an injury or illness.

## Understanding pain

Any surgery, medical procedure or trauma may be painful. Parents are often surprised by the amount of pain their child has after a surgery. Each person experiences pain differently, and the signs of pain vary. Your child may be quiet and less active or restless and easily angered.

Your child has the right to adequate pain relief. The health care team at Children's will provide your child with the best possible pain relief. We may not be able to get rid of all of your child's pain, but it can be controlled with your help. It is important to work with your child's health care team to help choose comfort methods. Tell us how your child shows pain and what you know seems to help.

## Rating your child's pain

Help us rate your child's pain. The nurses and doctors will ask you or your child to rate the pain from zero to ten, using the Wong-Baker FACES pain scale on the right. Zero means your child has no pain, and ten is the worst pain that can be imagined. The nurse may also ask your child to describe the type of pain, such as dull or

sharp. If your child is unable to speak, the health care team will rely on you to gauge the level of pain your child is having. We will also look at other things, such as heart rate and body movement.

## Keeping on top of the pain

It is important to keep on top of the pain. This means treating pain early. Ask your child about their pain when you see the first sign of mild pain before it becomes severe. Relieving pain early will make your child more comfortable, increase activity and strength, and help your child feel better. Effective pain control will also help your child to recover faster.

There are drug and non-drug methods that can help to control your child's pain. Please tell your child's health care team if your child has taken pain medicines before or if a specific treatment has worked for your child in the past.

## Becoming addicted to pain medicine

Many parents are concerned about the potential for addiction to pain medicine. We know you even worry about giving Tylenol to your child. It is very rare that a patient becomes addicted to pain medicine when it's only taken it for a short period of time.

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From Hockenberry MJ, Wilson D, Winkelstein ML: *Wong's Essentials of Pediatric Nursing*, ed. 7, St. Louis, 2005, p.1259. Used with permission. Copyright, Mosby.

### Giving pain medicine before and after surgery

A member of the anesthesia team is assigned to your child's surgery to plan for his or her pain control. Right before or during surgery, an intravenous (IV) line is placed in your child's hand or foot. The IV line is a thin tube, or catheter, put into a vein to deliver pain medicine or fluids during surgery.

Immediately after surgery, your child is given pain medicine through this catheter. Once the pain has decreased and your child is able to tolerate food and liquids, the IV will be removed. Then, pain medicines will be offered in the form of pills or liquid. Please follow the instructions for pain medicines. If you have any questions, ask them before you go home. Do not wait until your child's pain is out of control before giving them pain medicine.

Over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen is very effective for mild pain, even minor pain after surgery. If this is not controlling your child's pain, ask for stronger medicine. If your child's pain is severe, ask your doctor about giving the pain medicines at regular times for one or two days. This may prevent the pain from getting worse.

### Common side effects of pain medicine

All medicine can produce side effects. Here are some common side effects from pain medicines you should know about:

- **Constipation.** You can prevent this by giving your child juice and water and foods with fiber, like fruits, bran muffins or graham crackers. Simple activities, like walking (once this activity has been approved by the doctor), are also great ways to get the bowels regular.
- **Nausea and vomiting.** Please report this side effect to your child's doctor, who may change the medicine.
- **Sleepiness.** All pain medicines can make your child feel drowsy and tired. Please let the doctor know if your child seems too sleepy.

### Complementary measures — helpful things to do beyond the medicine

- **Deep breathing.** A common response to pain is to tense the muscles. Tell your child to take slow, deep breaths to relax tense muscles or to relieve pain. These deep breaths bring in fresh oxygen to the muscles.
- **Imagery.** This is a process of imagining through the senses. Have your child close his eyes and imagine feeling the sun's warmth or hearing the ocean.
- **Music.** Soothing music can also relax your child. Bring in a favorite tape or CD.
- **Massage.** A therapeutic body massage is another way to relax. Give your child a back rub, if the doctor says it is all right. If your child is admitted to the hospital and is staying on our hospital unit, ask your child's nurse about massage options.
- **Acupuncture and acupressure.** Ask your nurse to contact the Pain Service about these two therapies.

### When to call the doctor

Follow the recommendations given in the For More Information box below if your child has any of the following:

- Worsening of pain
- Pain unrelieved by pain medicine
- Increase in side effects

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm please contact your surgeon's office.
- After 5 pm and on Saturday and Sunday, please call 206-987-2000 and ask for your surgeon's on call provider.

*Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.*

*This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.*