

Pancreatitis Acute Pain

How to prevent and relieve pain from pancreatitis

This handout describes how to help your child with pain they may have with pancreatitis.

Acute pain is short-lasting and usually gets better over time. There can be short- and long-term consequences when pain is not treated at all, or not treated enough. Effective pain control will help your child get better faster. We partner with you and your child to prevent and relieve pain as completely as possible.

How will my child show pain?

Every child reacts to pain differently. Your child's pancreatic pain can:

- Range from mild to severe
- Spread to the back
- Get worse with eating
- Become constant

Other common symptoms of pain include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Food or liquid refusal
- Diarrhea
- Swollen belly if fluid collects around the pancreas
- Fever

Your child's belly may be tender if pressed on and they may have a fast heartbeat and pulse.

How do you assess how much my child is hurting?

We regularly measure the intensity of pain by using a pain scale that matches the developmental level of your child. For more information see our handout "Assessing Children's Pain" at

seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE952.pdf.

It is best for your child to report their own pain. We ask them to describe where it hurts, how much it hurts, what makes it better or worse, and what it feels like to them.

To Learn More

- Gastroenterology
206-987-2521
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

What can be done to prevent and relieve pain?

Our goal is to prevent pain when possible. Ask if pain is to be expected and what will be done to prevent it.

When pain is not prevented, it should be responded to early before it becomes more severe. Relieving pain early will make your child more comfortable, increase activity and strength, and promote healing. Treating pain early can also lead to less use of pain medicines overall.

We use medicine and other strategies to treat pain. Because pain is complex and each person's response is different, it is often best to use more than one method at the same time.

Medicines to help with pain

When used appropriately, pain medicines are safe and effective. The amount of pain medicine needed depends on your child's weight, type of pain and health.

Medicine for mild pain is most often given by mouth. Over-the-counter medicines like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) are often used for this type of pain. They work very well to control pain. For moderate or severe pain, we may prescribe a stronger type of pain medicine such as oxycodone. A combination of medicines is often used to prevent and treat pain.

It is important to work with your child's care team to discuss pain medicines that will work best for your child. Even common over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, can interact with certain prescriptions or medical conditions. Check with your child's healthcare provider first before giving any type of medicine to your child and always follow the directions on the bottle or dosing table given to you by the provider.

For pain that is ongoing, it is best to give pain medicine regularly on a schedule.

Sedation along with pain relief may be recommended for some procedures. Talk with your child's care team.

Will my child become addicted to pain medicine?

When given and monitored appropriately, children do not become addicted to pain medicine. When children need long-term control, their bodies may get used to the medicine (become tolerant) and need a higher dose of pain medicine to get the same relief. Because the body becomes used to having these medicines, when the pain improves, the dose is slowly reduced to prevent discomfort from withdrawal.

Numbing creams to help with pain

For IV starts, blood tests, injections, and port access, numbing cream (LMX-4) can be put on the skin ahead of time to help reduce needle pain.

Another topical anesthetic is J-tip, which is a system for quickly delivering numbing medicine through the skin without the use of needles.

Non-medicine ways to help with pain

In addition to medicine, there are other ways to relieve pain.

Cognitive-behavioral approaches

Many children may learn methods to help control their own pain and its impact. Psychologists often teach these methods, tailored to your child's needs.

Self-regulatory strategies

Children can use many methods to distract themselves from pain or change their pain experience. This may lessen or get rid of the pain. These methods include breathing techniques, muscle relaxation, guided imagery, and self-hypnosis.

Coping and problem solving

Often, children with pain need to learn ways to adapt and do regular activities even though they have pain. This is most true for children with chronic or recurrent pain. Rather than being victims of their pain, they can use methods to cope with challenges and solve problems. We teach these methods along with using other treatment approaches that may help with your child's condition.

How can I help my child with pain?

Support your child, provide comfort, and help discover what works best to give your child relief.

- Know that the job of pain control belongs to everyone caring for your child. Talk to your child's healthcare team about how your child shows pain and what seems to help.
- Emphasize the positive ways your child can become more relaxed. Support your child's efforts to cope with distressing procedures and pain. Tell what others are doing to relieve their pain.
- Keep in mind that your child may sense your anxiety.
- Know that you may choose to leave the room during a painful procedure.
- If you choose to stay, you may ask for ways to participate in supporting your child.

Where should I keep pain medicines?

To keep your family safe, store medicines inside a locked cabinet or location where others cannot easily get to them. Taking leftover pain or other medicines on purpose or by accident, can be very dangerous.

For more information about safe disposal of unused prescription medications including pain medications, read our handout "How to Get Rid of Unused Prescription Medicines" at

seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE784.pdf

To find a take back place near you visit takebackyourmeds.org.

What are some other resources?

If your child has unrelieved pain or pain continues longer than expected, contact your child's doctor. In addition, talk to your child's care team for information about other resources. These may include:

- Pain Medicine Clinic 206-987-1520
- Gastroenterology Clinic 206-987-2521
- Child Life Specialists 206-987-2037

Visit the webpages below to read more about how to support your child during surgery and when getting shots:

- What to Expect on Your Surgery Day at Seattle Children's Surgery Center
seattlechildrens.org/patients-families/surgery/preparing-your-child
- Reducing the Pain and Anxiety of Needles
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1166.pdf

Meet your pain team

All team members are committed to partner with you and your child to improve pain. Let your care team know if you have questions or feedback at any time.

- Gary A. Walco, PhD, Director, Pain Medicine
- See Wan Tham, MB BS, Pain Medicine doctor
- Annette Anderson, ARNP, Pain Medicine nurse practitioner