

Managing your pain



Pain is an unpleasant physical or emotional sensation aimed to prevent further injury or harm. Pain can be acute (lasts a short time) caused by an injury, strain or sprain or headache, or chronic which is persistent and ongoing.

Symptoms

The two main types of pain are nociceptive and neuropathic. Nociceptive pain is caused by damage to muscles, ligaments or joints. It can be intense, or a dull throbbing pain. Neuropathic pain is a burning or shooting sensation due to nerve damage.

Chronic pain

Chronic pain should always be assessed by your doctor to determine your best treatment options. Chronic pain is usually due to a known cause, but can occur for no diagnosed reason. Other less common causes are nerve pain, or pain that remains long after a surgical procedure. Pain can be accompanied by depression or anxiety if it continues for a long time.

Arthritis occurs in the joints of the body. Osteoarthritis occurs with ageing and commonly causes pain and stiffness of the hands, knees and hips. Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when the body destroys its own cells and causes swelling and inflammation.

Back injury such as a fracture, slipped disc or a strained muscle can cause ongoing and debilitating pain.

Migraines are a particular type of headache that can last for hours or days. Migraines can be triggered by stress, hormone changes, or some medicines. Some people can sense that a migraine is coming on due to changes in their vision, smell or hearing. This is called an 'aura'.

Lifestyle options

Generally a combination of methods should be tried including rest, medicines, physiotherapy, psychological therapy (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy) or TENS (trans electrical nerve stimulation); and self-help techniques such as mindfulness, meditation or yoga. Eating a healthy diet, getting sufficient sleep, avoiding stress, losing weight and quitting smoking can assist. Support organisations, such as Arthritis Australia, can provide specialised support strategies (see healthinformationaustralia.com.au).

Ask your pharmacist or doctor about a pain management plan and a pain diary. Effective lifestyle options include:

Rheumatoid Arthritis – regular exercise to preserve muscle strength, balanced with sufficient rest. When joints are painful use heat or cooling pads and use aids for daily living, such as jar or can openers.

Osteoarthritis – reduce body weight, do regular gentle weight bearing exercise.

Back and ongoing injuries – appropriate regular exercises as recommended by your health professional. Gentle massage and stretching can be helpful.

Migraines – avoid known triggers, rest in a darkened room, take a relaxing warm bath or gentle massage with calming oils, such as lavender oil.

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any other medicines, or if you have any other health conditions, because some over-the-counter medicines may not be suitable for you.

- **Anti-inflammatories** can be effective at managing chronic pain when used in conjunction with other lifestyle strategies. Some examples are ibuprofen, diclofenac and naproxen. They are available as tablets, capsules or creams and gels. Higher doses and regular use require medical supervision. Take anti-inflammatories with food, and if you develop any stomach pain or indigestion, tell your doctor or pharmacist immediately. Always double check children's doses prior to administration.

Do not take anti-inflammatory medicines if you have stomach ulcers, kidney disease or are pregnant. Check with your pharmacist or doctor if you have asthma, cardiovascular disease or are breastfeeding.

- **Paracetamol** is available as liquid and tablets. There are many different brands of paracetamol and it can be found in many combination products. Ask your pharmacist to confirm if any other medicines you are taking contain paracetamol to avoid accidentally taking too much. Always double check children's doses prior to administration.
- **Hot and cold Packs** can be placed on an affected joint or body part to help relieve pain. They can be filled with either a jelly or wheat. Always follow directions for use.
- **Aids to daily living** such as jar openers, tap turners, various hand rails, braces, special eating utensils, walkers and frames are available to help with daily tasks and improve mobility.

Prescription options

- **Migraine prevention medicines** are taken regularly to reduce the occurrence of migraines.
- **Opiate medicines, such as codeine, oxycodone and morphine** are prescription-only pain relievers that can be added to lifestyle management strategies, as part of a comprehensive approach to pain management. They can cause side effects such as constipation and drowsiness.

Ask your pharmacist for advice on the most suitable treatment.

More information

Painaustralia: www.painaustralia.org.au

Chronic Pain Australia:
www.chronicpinaustralia.org.au

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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Health Information Australia

PO Box 9421
Deakin ACT 2600

P: 1300 598 884
www.healthinformationaustralia.com.au



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