



MANAGING PERSISTENT PAIN in OLDER PEOPLE | Tips for the Caregiver

Many older adults are affected by *chronic, or persistent, pain*, which is pain that lasts longer than 3 months. Older people with persistent pain often need help from family and friends to perform normal, everyday activities, including walking, bathing, or dressing. As a caregiver, you have an important role in providing physical care and emotional support for your loved one(s). This handout offers tips for recognizing signs of pain, reducing pain and discomfort, and speaking with healthcare providers.

How can you tell when your loved one is in pain?

It can be upsetting to see someone you care about in pain. As the caregiver, you are in the best position to recognize signs of pain. Here are a few rules of thumb:

- ▶ **Trust is key.** If older adults think that no one believes they are having pain, they may become upset and stop reporting their pain accurately.
- ▶ **Know what “normal” behavior is.** Keep close watch for changes in appetite and sleep, and be aware of increased wandering.
- ▶ **Pay attention to body language.** Older adults may not want to report pain or may be unable to express their pain in words, so it is important to be aware of their body language. Body language includes facial

expressions (for example, frowning, frightened face), wrinkling the forehead, closing the eyes tightly, rapid blinking, tears, or clenched fists.

- ▶ **Listen for words other than “pain.”** Different words such as “ache” or “sore” may be used to describe pain.
- ▶ **Listen for sounds.** Moaning, groaning, or sighing may be a sign that the person is uncomfortable or in pain.
- ▶ **Watch for any body movements that might be signs of pain.** These can include twitching, rocking, or a stiff upper or lower body that is rigid and is moved slowly.
- ▶ **Note mental changes.** Pain can sometimes cause stressful emotions such as crying, confusion, or annoyance.

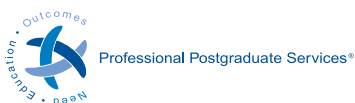
What to do if you notice these signs:

As the caregiver, it is important for you to recognize and report these changes to the healthcare provider. Make sure you know the following information about your loved one’s pain:

- ▶ Location of the pain (for example, head or leg), what the pain feels like (for example, sharp or thumping), how long the pain lasts, and when the pain occurs (for example, after a meal or in the morning)
- ▶ Mention any actions that cause the pain, such as body movement
- ▶ Any mental or behavioral changes, including depression or anger
- ▶ Types of medications the person is taking and any side effects that the medications may be causing

Also be sure to:

- ▶ Be clear when talking with the healthcare provider and stay calm.
- ▶ Follow the healthcare provider’s suggestions and directions carefully. If your loved one is still in pain, follow up with the healthcare provider immediately so that treatment can be adjusted. Continue seeing the healthcare provider until the pain has improved.



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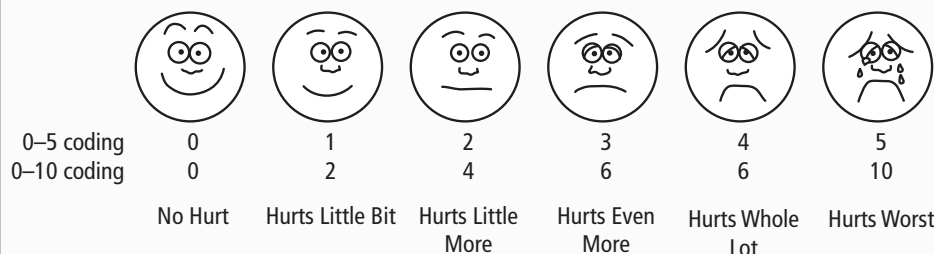
Tools for Measuring Pain in Older Adults

Because older adults may have difficulty talking and clearly expressing what they feel to their healthcare providers, several tools have been created to help measure pain and identify daily activities that cause pain.

- ▶ **FACES Pain Rating Scale**—A visual tool for those who might have difficulty using words to explain how their painful symptoms make them feel. It shows faces that are scored from 0 to 10, where a score of 0 is a smiley face (no pain) and 10 is a crying face (worst pain).
- ▶ **Pain Thermometer**—A visual tool that looks like a thermometer and can be used for people who have difficulty explaining their pain in words. The top of the thermometer is “pain as bad as could be” and the bottom is “no pain.”
- ▶ **Daily pain diary**—This can be used everyday to record pain and what steps were taken to reduce pain. One way to record pain is to rate it on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is severe pain. You can also record simple things that can affect pain, such as weather or any worries. Bring this diary to each appointment with the healthcare provider.

FACES Pain Rating Scale

Each face is for a person who feels happy because she has no pain (hurt) or sad because she has some or a lot of pain. Choose the face that best describes your own pain.



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.

REFERENCES American Geriatrics Society Foundation for Health in Aging. Assessing pain in loved ones with dementia: a guide for family and caregivers. Available at: http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/pain. • American Geriatrics Society Foundation for Health in Aging. Pain. In: *Eldercare at home. A comprehensive online guide for family caregivers*. Available at: http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/eldercare. • National Family of Caregivers. Advocating for a loved one in pain: presented by the American Academy of Pain Management. Available at: http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org/caregiving_resources/aaapm.cfm. • Sharp E. For the caregiver: recognizing and responding to pain in loved ones with dementia. In: *Dimensions*. 2008. Available at: <http://depts.washington.edu/adrcweb/DIMENSIONS.shtml>. • World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific. Care for the patients in pain. In: *Nursing care of the sick: A guide for nurses working in small rural hospitals*. Manila, Philippines: World Health Organization;1998:chap 13. Available at: http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/8AD3E358-AD6C-46CA-9E27-0664E59E161F/0/Nursing_Care_of_the_Sick.pdf. • All websites accessed May 14, 2009.

What are some other ways to reduce my loved one's pain and discomfort?

- ✓ Show that you recognize the pain and respond with a caring attitude
- ✓ Talk slowly and quietly
- ✓ A soothing massage and/or comforting touch can sometimes help to ease the pain
- ✓ Help her change the way that she is sitting or lying down to make her more comfortable
- ✓ Invite visitors to comfort him with friendly conversation
- ✓ Play her favorite music quietly

Helpful Websites

The Following Websites Offer Information And Resources For People Who Are Affected By Persistent Pain And Their Caregivers:

- ▶ **American Pain Foundation**
www.painfoundation.org
- ▶ **American Academy of Pain Management**
www.aapainmanage.org
- ▶ **American Chronic Pain Association**
www.theacpa.org
- ▶ **National Pain Foundation**
www.nationalpainfoundation.org
- ▶ **Pain Connection**
www.painconnection.org

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Talk to Your Healthcare Provider**

