

Pain At Home: Taking Care of Your Child

This brochure gives information on how to care for your child at home when they are in pain. The pain may be because of a cut from a minor fall, sprain, a sore throat, earache, or a procedure they had at the hospital, such as resetting a broken bone and applying a cast.

Parents can help make the best pain relief decisions for their own child because they know their children best.

What you need to know about your child's pain

- Not all children feel pain the same way.
- In the days after a painful event the pain should get better, not worse.
- Pain medicine will help your child hurt less.
- Comforting your child will help them relax and relieve pain.
- Distracting your child can help relieve pain.
- Comfort and distraction can be as important as giving medicine to your child.

Pain assessment: knowing if your child is in pain

Sometimes your child will say when he/she hurts. He may use words like pain, hurt, boohoo, sore or ouchie. Your child may point to the part that hurts, or protect it. If your child doesn't complain of pain, you can ask them how much pain they have.

If your child is older, you may use a 0 to 10 pain scale to find out how much pain your child has. Ask your child to rate the pain on a scale from 0 to 10. 0 is no pain, and 10 is the worst pain ever.

Mild pain would be 0 to 3, medium pain would be 4 to 6, and strong pain would be more than 7.

You may also use a word pain scale asking your child if it hurts a little, a medium amount or a lot.

Some children will not speak about their pain

Your child may not be able to talk or tell you about their pain. Watch your child carefully and see what you think. Parents often know if their child has pain.

What to look for to see if your child is in pain

Look and see if your child frowns, or kicks out his legs. Does he grind his teeth? Does your child pull his legs up to his stomach? If he moans or cries more than usual, or is stiff, your child may have pain. A child in pain may also lie very still and not want to move or do things they might normally want to do, like play, watch TV, or eat.

Pain management: relieving your child's pain at home with pain medicine

Do not wait to give pain medicine

Pain relief works best when you do not wait until your child is in a lot of pain before you give the medicine. If you wait, it may take longer for the pain to go away.

The amount of medicine to give depends on your child's age and weight. If you have left the hospital with a prescription for pain medication, follow the directions given to you by the doctor and pharmacist.

Be aware of possible side effects of medication. Side effects are problems that the medicine itself causes. Speak to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about side effects.

There are many different kinds of pain medicines. Some examples are:

Acetaminophen

Common brand names of acetaminophen are Tylenol or Tempra. These are three different names for the same medicine. If your child is having mild pain, you can use acetaminophen regularly every 4 hours. Acetaminophen is a safe medicine to give your child. There will be no major side effects when you give this medicine as explained on the box or bottle.

Ibuprofen

Common brand names of ibuprofen are Advil and Motrin. These are three different names for the same medicine. Ask your doctor if it's OK to give Advil to your child for pain. Ibuprofen and acetaminophen are helpful to take in combination.

Other pain medicines

The nurse, advanced practice nurse, or doctor may suggest or prescribe other pain medicines for your child to use at home. Make sure you ask how and when to use this other medicine. The nurse, advanced practice nurse, or doctor may tell you that you can use the other medicine by itself, or together with acetaminophen. You may be prescribed opioids (strong pain medicines) for moderate or severe pain. Opioids are medicines such as morphine, hydromorphone, and oxycodone. Follow any prescription advice

carefully. If you have any questions, contact your child's doctor or pharmacist.

Topical anaesthetic (cream)

There are times when you know ahead of time that your child is going to have a painful procedure, such as a needle for an immunization. There are things you can do to help with the pain, such as using an anaesthetic cream that numbs the skin like Emla, Maxilene, or Ametop. Follow the directions on the package.

Lessening pain without medicine

There are two main ways to reduce pain without medicine. One is by using physical comfort methods, and the other is by using psychological distraction strategies.

Physical comfort measures to reduce pain

Comfort your child in the ways that worked best for them.

- Ice packs: these are the best choice if swelling is present; maximum use of ice pack should be 15 minutes, once an hour.
- Moist heat: this is the best choice when swelling is not a concern and three days after an acute injury; maximum use of moist heat should be 20 minutes, once an hour; the heat should feel "warm" not "hot" to avoid risk of burn.
- Hold, cuddle, rock, or stroke your child.
- Rubbing or massaging an area in pain.
- Put a pillow under the sore area.
- Getting up out of bed and moving as well as changing position can be helpful.



Psychological distraction strategies to reduce pain

These work by taking your child's attention away from their pain. Some children are distracted by:

- watching TV, videos, DVDs, or computer games
- storytelling
- blowing bubbles
- playing with you
- playing with their favorite toy

Finding out how your child is doing (re-assessing pain)

After you have tried measures to relieve your child's pain, it is important to check and see if his pain has changed. Here is how you can check:

- Check how much pain your child has 1 hour after you give pain medicine.

- Ask your child about the pain on the scale from 0 to 10, or "hurts a little, hurts a lot," or look carefully at how he acts.
- If your child is still in pain, call your family doctor for advice.
- Remember to comfort your child and try to take his attention away from the pain.
- If the combination of pain medicine, physical comfort and psychological distraction do not help reduce the pain, or if your child's pain gets worse, call your doctor.

Key points

- Children do not all feel pain the same way.
- You can find out how much pain your child is in by asking and by observing their behavior.
- Your child's pain can be lowered with pain medicines. Always follow the directions given to you by the nurse, doctor or pharmacist.
- Your child's pain can also be lowered with physical and behavioural methods.
- Re-assess your child's pain.