

Pain Control Beyond Drugs

What does it mean to you to be comfortable?

Different people may have different answers to this question. To one person it may mean not having a worry in the world while to another it could mean just being free from a nagging backache.

Residents, too, may differ in their view of what it means to be comfortable. However, one thing that they all probably would agree on is that if they are having pain, they are not comfortable!

Helping residents relieve pain and be comfortable are important nursing care measures. Most residents would put these measures at the top of the list of what is important to them. As a nursing caregiver, you need to know how to help residents relieve pain and be as comfortable as possible.

Pain Medications

Often, when people have pain they first think of taking a medication to relieve it. Television and magazine ads regularly highlight the many drugs available for headaches, aching joints, and other discomforts, so it is no surprise that people reach for a drug when

they need to relieve pain.

Pain medications are useful, however, for people who are old or who must take them regularly, these drugs can cause problems.

Older Bodies React to Drugs Differently

As people age, their bodies handle drugs differently. Drugs take longer to be absorbed and to travel through the body of older people. The reduced function of some of the body's organs in late life slow down the process of eliminating the drug from the bloodstream. As a result, drugs stay in the bloodstream longer and can build up to dangerous levels that can cause complications.

Using Many Drugs Increases Risks

Many of the residents you care for have several different medical problems for which medications are prescribed. These drugs can interact with each other. For example, one drug can increase the effects of another drug, or cause another drug to be less effective. The risk for side effects and complications increases when

Pain medications have benefits but also risks, especially for older residents

the number of drugs a resident takes increases.

Diseases Can Change Drug Actions

Some diseases can change the way drugs behave in the body. For example, kidney disease can slow down the body's ability to eliminate drugs. As mentioned earlier, when drugs are not eliminated as they normally should be, they can build up to high levels that can cause serious complications.

These comments about the risks of drugs are not meant to cause you to think that drugs are bad. That is not the case.

Drugs do have a place in pain control and can help residents achieve a high quality of life. Rather, the point is that because drugs do carry risks, they should be used carefully and only when there are no other ways to control pain.

Your Role in Pain Control

You may not realize how much of an important role you play in the management of residents' pain. Your efforts can help their pain to be better controlled and reduce their need to medications. Let's look at actions that could be helpful.

Helping to Assess

Assessment—the collection of information about a resident—is a very important part of nursing care. Good assessment helps staff to understand residents' problems, care needs, and progress.

Your direct work with residents puts you in an ideal position to know things about them that other members of the team may not know. Your observations, especially about changes in the way residents act or feel, can help problems that increase a resident's pain to be identified

Painful facts about pain...

- 1 in 4 people report that they suffered a day-long bout of pain in the last month
- 1 in 10 people under age 65 claim to have pain that has lasted more than a year; nearly 3 in 5 people over age 65 said they had pain that lasted over a year
- The most common pain complaints are low back pain, migraine, and joint pain
- A majority of people with pain report that they feel depressed, can't sleep well, have trouble concentrating, and experience work problems
- More than half of the people with pain feel they have little or no control over their pain



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2006. National Center for Health Statistics Report: Health, United States, 2006, Special Feature on Pain, www.cdc.gov/nchs/hsus.htm

Signs of Pain



- Crying, moaning
- Grimacing, tense-looking face
- Rise in pulse, respirations, or blood pressure
- New or worsening of confusion or behavioral problems
- Problems getting to or staying asleep
- Poor appetite, reduced intake
- Touching, rubbing, or splinting a body part
- Change in ability to care for self, move, or walk
- Disinterest in social activities or visitors

After conditions are diagnosed, treatments may be prescribed. By helping the resident receive the treatment, you can improve the resident's level of comfort.

Non-Drug Measures to Control Pain

Many basic nursing care measures can do wonders to promote residents' comfort. Often, the little things mean a lot, such as:

- helping residents to reposition themselves
- setting up a food tray and assisting with feeding
- giving a backrub or massaging the shoulders
- listening and talking with the resident
- keeping the environment quiet and pleasant

Pain can reduce residents' level of function and quality of life

and treated early. Some of the signs of pain that you would want to observe and report are describe in the box above.

Supporting Treatments

If your feet hurt because you're wearing shoes that are a few sizes too small, you could take a pain pill to numb the pain. However, the wisest action you could take would be to remove the shoes. Likewise, when residents have pain, the best action is to eliminate the source of the pain, when possible.

Pain could be caused by conditions that are treatable. These include infections, drug reactions, poor positioning, and uncontrolled diseases. The signs you observe and report can help the doctors and nurses identify conditions that are causing pain.



Spending time talking with and listening to a resident can help take the resident's mind off his pain.

Comfort measures that you can offer residents can reduce their need for medications

For many people, gently touching, rubbing and massaging are comforting. Before rubbing or massaging an area, ask the resident if it is alright to do so. (Not everyone responds favorably to being touched.) If the resident is fine with you doing so, rub or massage the area gently. Using lotion can provide comfort and help to moisten the skin.

Most people in the U.S. believe in God and the power of prayer. Praying for improved health and freedom from pain is not unusual. If you see a resident praying or are aware of their desire to do so, afford privacy. Ask the resident if he or she wants a Bible or religious article. If you are comfortable doing so, ask the resident if she or he would like you to pray with or for him or her. Be sure not to force your faith or religious practices on a resident.

There are a variety of treatments that can be used for pain control that fall under the category of complementary and alternative therapies (see next page). Many of these can prove helpful in controlling pain. As these are treatments, may carry risks, and in some cases require specially trained people to do them, the nurse and doctor need to be aware that the resident is using them.

Pain is a serious matter for residents that can cause them to develop new problems and cause them to have a poor quality of life. Helping residents to prevent and control pain are important nursing measures that can make a big difference in residents lives. There are many measures can be used, instead of or in addition to pain medications, that can offer residents comfort and promote their highest level of function.

You can help residents relax and be comfortable by:



Massaging the hands



Massaging the feet

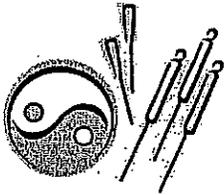


Massaging the shoulders and back



Massaging the head

Some Complementary and Alternative Therapies for Pain Control



Acupuncture:

This therapy has been practiced for thousands of years as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is based on the belief that there are invisible lines of energy running through the body and when any of these energy lines get blocked, illness results. To correct the problem, needles are placed at different points along these lines.

Acupuncture should only be done by a trained professional.



Aromatherapy

This is a branch of herbal medicine that uses scents from the essential oils of plants to cause certain reactions in the body. For example, the scent of lavender, rose, and geranium are calming.



Chiropractic

This therapy is based on the belief that health problems are related to the spine getting out of alignment. A chiropractor moves the spine back into place to relieve symptoms. Chiropractic is often used to treat back problems.



Guided Imagery

With this therapy, a person is given suggestions of images to think about, such as a medication traveling through the body to get rid of pain or a peaceful place. The body reacts to this suggestion by calming the person to help relieve pain.



Herbal Medicine

The use of plants to bring about therapeutic results falls under this category. For example, white willow relieves joint pain, valerian relaxes muscles, and capsicum (chili pepper oil) rubbed on a joint can provide relief. Because herbs can have powerful effects and interact with drugs, they should only be used under the direction of a professional.



Progressive Relaxation

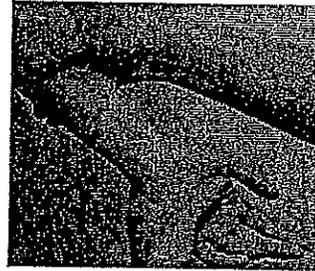
This is a series of exercises in which the person closes his or her eyes, takes deep breaths, and relaxes different parts of the body to achieve a state of deep relaxation. A caregiver can guide a resident through this; there are tapes that have scripts on them that can be used, also.

All complementary and alternative therapies should be reviewed with the health care team before used.

Giving a Basic Hand Massage

Hand massages can be very useful in providing comfort and calming residents. Ask a coworker to be a partner and practice this simple technique for hand massage.

Pour a small amount of lotion in the palm of your hands and cradle one of the person's hands between your hands. Support the hand and gently stroke from the area of the person's wrist to the fingertips. (Hint: scented lotions are pleasant and relaxing to use.)



Using your thumbs, make circular motions from the center of the person's palms toward the edge of the hand. Turn the person's hand over and massage the outer surface of the hand.



With your thumb and index finger, massage each finger, starting at the joint where the finger meets the main part of the hand and working toward the tip. Gently make circular motions with each finger, as though doing range of motion.



Finish the massage by holding the person's hand between your hands and gently rubbing and stroking.



Tip: Consider exchanging hand massages with a coworker during break time to aid in reducing your stress!

Etc...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pain Control Beyond Drugs Test Questions

1. Which is a true statement about the use of pain medications in older residents:
 - a. Pain medications are not effective in older people
 - b. Pain medications carry greater risks for causing problems in older people
 - c. Pain medications eliminate the need to use other pain control measures and save the staff time
6. Nursing Assistant Pane is known as a very religious person and a person of strong faith. Resident Simms, whom Ms. Pane is caring for, is a known atheist. Resident Simms is seriously ill with cancer and suffering from pain. Ms. Pane tells you that she is concerned for Mr. Simms and believes he needs prayer to be relieved of his pain and "to be prepared to meet the Lord". She intends to go to Mr. Simms room and pray over him. Your best advice to Ms. Pane is:
 - a. "Prayer is comforting to residents and you would be helping Mr. Simms by praying with him."
 - b. "You should share the difference your faith has made in your life and pray over him, even if he is not participating."
 - c. "You should respect Mr. Simms' views on faith and not pray over him or in his presence."

Your role in detecting and reporting signs is very important to a resident's pain control program. State four possible signs of pain that you could see:

2.

3.

4.

5.

Four of the measures you can use to help residents be comfort include:

7.

8.

9.

10.