

Pain Management for the Surgical Patient

Introduction

It is normal to experience some level of pain after any surgical procedure. It is the job of the nurses and doctors to evaluate and appropriately treat post-operative discomfort or pain.

What is Pain?

Pain is an unpleasant feeling that is caused by stimulation of nerve endings; therefore, it is important that the cause be found. Pain can make a person feel afraid or anxious. In addition, when people have pain, some may openly display it. Crying could be one example. Others do not openly show the amount of pain that they are feeling or may be reluctant to say that they are having pain. The feelings we have and how open we are about our pain may differ for each of us and vary from person to person.

How Can You Help the Nurses and Doctors When You Are Having Pain?

If you are experiencing “pain” or discomfort, it is **IMPORTANT** to report it to the nurse so steps can be taken to relieve it. The nurse uses what you report about your pain to help decide what will best relieve it. You can help by telling the nurse about the following:

- ◆ Location of the pain that you are feeling;
- ◆ Type of pain that you are having— dull, sharp, nagging, shooting, etc.;
- ◆ Amount of pain that you are having using a rating scale.

It is helpful if you can tell the nurse the amount of pain you are having on a scale from “0” to “10”. A zero represents **NO** pain and a 10 on the scale represents the **WORST** pain that you can imagine.



Families are an important part of the pain evaluation, especially when the patient is not able to communicate verbally to be able to tell the nurses and doctors about the pain. Families can also be helpful in explaining any other things that need to be considered, such as cultural or religious practicing, drug allergies, etc., so the nurse and doctor can most effectively manage the patient’s pain.

How Do Children Act and Show Us They Are Having Pain?

Babies and children of various ages have pain just as adults do. Often babies and children do not understand the reasons why they are having pain. Children react differently to pain, just as they react differently to many situations in contrast to an adult. All of the reactions of a child are related to his and/or her stage of life and the child's past experience with pain.

There are many ways that we can tell if a child is having discomfort or pain. The following are some of the signs a child may show that tells us they have pain:

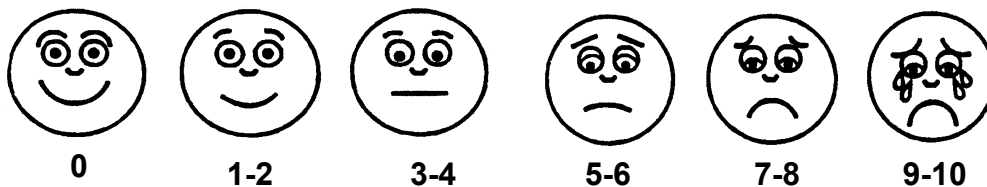
Newborns and/or young infants: Generalized stiffness, thrashing about; Eyebrows lowered, eyes tightly closed

Older infants: Facial expression, eyes open; Pull or push away at the painful area

Young child: Loud crying, screaming "ouch"; Thrashing arms and legs

School age child: Complaining of pain; Acting younger than their age (regressive behavior); Gritting teeth, clenched fists, closed eyes

Toddlers or older children may also be able to tell how much pain they are having by using the following "FACES" scale:



Faces 0 indicates no pain: Face 1-2 may indicate slight discomfort: Face 3-4 hurts a little more; Face 5-6 hurts even more; Face 7-8 hurts a whole lot more; Face 9-10 hurts as much as you can imagine; although you don't have to be crying to feel this bad. *Review the faces with your child prior to surgery,*

Elderly Patients With Pain

The elderly have unique responses to pain and there are special considerations to manage their pain. Many elderly have complicated medical histories and are also taking medications that need to be considered. Sometimes dosages and types of pain medications need to be changed due to the way elderly patient's bodies react.

Treatment of Your Pain

As we expect varying levels of discomfort with all surgical procedures, patients are routinely given pain medication during surgery. After surgery, the type and amount of pain medicine you receive will be determined by the type of surgery you had, your description of the pain and the amount of pain you are having according to the scale.

(Babies and young children will be given pain medication based on signs of pain.) The pain scale will also evaluate the amount of pain relief you get after receiving pain medication. Please review the pain scale prior to surgery,

When Discharged from the Hospital After Surgery

The nurse will review the type and amount of pain relieving medications you should take at home, as well as instructions needed.

Remember that pain medications can make you drowsy; therefore, you should not drive or operate machinery after taking them.