

Pain Management Basics

Your brain uses the sensation of pain to protect your body. **Acute pain** warns of an injury or problem that requires prompt care. **Chronic pain** is different than acute pain in that it lasts much longer (months or years). Chronic pain begins as acute pain and then progresses with time. Because of this, it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of pain.

With chronic pain, patients often experience pain flares (brief bursts of additional pain). These may be caused by:

- Poor posture
- Poor body mechanics
- Loss of flexibility
- Low physical fitness
- Stress

Medicine is one of many ways to help pain. Other options include, but are not limited to:

- Physical therapy
- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Injection therapy
(if appropriate)
- Essential oils
- Chiropractic care
- Heat and cold
- Guided imagery
- Distraction
- Relaxation techniques
- Music

Treatment options may need to be combined for best results. **Your care team cannot promise you will be pain free.**

Pain medicine

Your pain may be managed with one or more of these:

- Opioids (narcotics)
- Muscle relaxants
- Nerve pain medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines or NSAIDS
- Topical products
(creams and lotions)

Opioids are more helpful when used briefly for acute pain. They are usually **not** the best way to manage chronic pain. If opioids are prescribed,

use them only as needed and never more than prescribed. Long-term use may lead to unwanted or unsafe side effects, dependence, and addiction. Provider guidelines have been issued by the Centers for Disease Control and the State of Wisconsin to:

- Limit doses for patient safety.
- Reduce risk of abuse.

Healthy habits while you take opioids

Set reasonable goals. Pain should be managed well enough for you to function. You will not have total relief from pain.

Stay active, but do not try to do too much. Spread tasks evenly throughout the day or week. Adjust your daily schedule to save energy.

Pace yourself and change positions often. Take short frequent breaks instead of one long break. Try to stretch every 10 to 15 minutes or as often as you can.

Avoid or limit emotional stress. Breathe deeply to help yourself stay relaxed and to relieve tension. Schedule time to relax each day. Yoga and meditation may also help you manage stress.

Eat a well balanced diet. You will have more energy and be able to stay more active.

Avoid drinking alcohol when taking opioids. You risk your life when you mix alcohol and opioids.

Other medicines can interact with opioids. Talk to your doctor about all the medicines you take, whether prescribed or over-the-counter. Tell your doctor if you use:

- Herbal products
- Drinks or powders for weight loss or gain
- Drinks or powders for increased energy or strength
- Anti-anxiety drugs
- Sleeping pills

Get restful sleep. The level of your pain relates to the amount and quality of your sleep. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Limit daytime napping. Create a bedtime ritual. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, drinking fluids, or eating close to bedtime. Do not exercise 2 hours before you go to bed.

Never drive or operate machinery while you are taking an opioid.

Opioid side effects: Short and long term

- Constipation – A common problem eased by:
 - Exercise
 - Drinking more fluids
 - Eating more fruits and vegetables
- Nausea and upset stomach
- Itching
- Sweating
- Decreased ability to fight infection
- Irritability
- Depression
- How you breathe when sleeping (sleep apnea)
- Testosterone level (male sex hormone)

Even when taken as prescribed, opioid use can lead to:

- Tolerance – Opioid effects lessen as your body gets used to them.
- Dependence – After you become used to an opioid, your body reacts if you stop taking it too quickly. Flu-like symptoms and severe problems may occur.
- Addiction – This can result when you take opioids for the wrong reasons, knowing they can harm your mind and body. Results of this choice may be:
 - Job loss
 - Divorce
 - Legal problems
 - Other consequences

Opioid storage

Pain medicine should not be stored with other household medicines. Keep it in a secure place. Lock it up if needed. Decide who must know what medicines you take because opioids may be abused by family or friends. Do not share prescription pain medicine with any other person. Opioids can be deadly to children, even in small doses.

Safe medicine disposal

When you stop taking an opioid or other prescribed medicine, dispose of them as soon as you can. To protect yourself, others and the environment,

- Do not put medicines in a sink or drain
- Do not flush them down the toilet

Unused or out-of-date pills, capsules, powders, liquids and inhalers can be disposed of in drop boxes after being prepared.

1. Remove the medicine from their container.
2. Place them in a leak-proof bag that can be sealed.
3. Peel or scratch personal information off labels
4. Rinse and toss boxes, bottles, and vials in your trash.

Drop boxes

Gundersen Health System- La Crosse Campus

- Main Clinic Lobby (near the pharmacy)
- East Building Pharmacy

Gundersen Health System- Onalaska Campus

- Clinic Pharmacy

There may be other disposal sites closer to your home. Police departments in La Crosse and other towns in this area have lobby drop boxes. Other drop box locations can be found by calling your local pharmacy or Great Rivers 2-1-1.

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This information is meant to inform and educate our patients. It supports the care you receive from your health care team. It does not replace medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your doctor or health care team before starting any new treatment.

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