

Describing and Rating Your Pain

Anyone who's had surgery or suffered a trauma that landed them in the emergency room, knows about pain. And the need to manage that pain, to get it under control, is critical to healing.

In the hospital, patients are encouraged to get out of bed, to walk, before they can be sent home. Walking also helps prevent blood clots and pneumonia. Once home, that healing may continue with physical or occupational therapy, rest and time, but those won't be very effective if you're in extreme pain.

"Working with the doctor on pain management was key."-David, Patient

David Toy recently had a knee replacement followed soon after by elbow surgery. Both times his medical team had a plan to get him moving again even back on the golf course with pain medication, ice and therapy.

"I think that's part of the program with pain management, it's that follow up. Their staff making sure that you're not going through any kind of painful episode during your recovery."-David, Patient

Your healthcare team should follow up with you, too. By regularly asking you to describe and rate your pain, they can make adjustments to get you back on your feet faster.

"The most popular pain scale is the one to 10 scale, 10 being the most unbearable, you know, intense pain you've ever experienced and 1 being very minimal dull pain."-Dr. Julie Freed, MD, Anesthesiologist

You should also describe where you are hurting. Is the pain dull, sharp or deep? Has it interfered with sleeping, exercising, work or social activities?

"Some people can have surgery and not need much pain control at all. Maybe that's because their makeup is sort of stoic and hey tough, or what have you, and others may just be very, very emotional like 'oh, my God, this is a catastrophe.'" -Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

"Over time you could just see the progression, the progress that the pain was starting to lower."-David, Patient

Your healthcare team will also be watching to make sure your pain is getting better as you heal that it's not turning into a long-term, chronic condition. Also, if you're taking opioids to manage the pain, they'll watch you carefully to make sure you're not becoming dependent. It's important to be honest about how you are actually feeling.

Describing and Rating Your Pain

"If your pain is a three and you tell us it's an eight and you overrate it, that could also lead to overmedication and other possible problems, such as addiction."- Dr. Julie Freed, MD, Anesthesiologist

The risk of addiction is very low when opioids are given for a short time to relieve acute pain. However, other side effects to be aware of include extreme tiredness or low blood pressure, trouble breathing, nausea, confusion, itching or hives, or constipation.

There is no test for pain, so your doctors and nurses are counting on you to rate your pain. That's the only way they can properly treat it.

"I was very grateful that they were constantly checking in on me and making sure that I was recovering the way I should be."-David, Patient