

Recognizing and Relieving Pain

1. When caring for a person you suspect is having pain, begin by asking, "Can you tell me if you are hurting? Having Discomfort?"
2. Observe the person for expressions or behaviors such as:
 - a. Moaning, crying, gasping or grunting
 - b. Shallow breathing
 - c. Grimacing, clenching teeth, biting lips, tightly closing or widely opening the eyes and mouth
 - d. Restless movement, muscle tension, increased hand and finger movements
 - e. Pacing, protecting or holding a body part, or being unwilling to move.
3. Watch the person as they talk or act around others. Look for:
 - a. Avoidance of conversation
 - b. Reduced attention span
 - c. Reduced contact with others
 - d. Loss of appetite
4. When the person admits having pain, ask him or her to rate the pain on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no pain and 10 being worst pain ever.
5. Compare the pain score with the person's usual personal pain score. Ask what is the least amount and most amount of pain the person has had.
6. If the current pain is more than usual or if it is sudden and occurring for the first time – take action (see steps 11 - 15)
7. Also have the person rate their pain just before you give them a pain medicine, then again 20 to 30 minutes later, and then about 4 hours later. This tells you if the pain medicine worked.
8. Have the person show you where the pain is. Have them use a finger to point to where the worst pain is located.
 - a. If you are uncertain about location clarify, example "Is the pain in your upper back? If not, show me where it is."
9. Ask the person how long they have had the pain and when it started.
10. Learn if the pain is the same as pain the person has had before. Or, is the pain new? Example, "Tell me what the pain feels like now."
11. If the person has pain medicine and you decide the pain is not new, give the medicine as directed. Give the person time to relax so the pain medicine can take effect.
12. If the pain is new and the person seems in distress, call their doctor.
13. Try these comfort measures to relieve pain:
 - a. Work with the person in choosing the measures that are most likely to be helpful.
 - b. Make the room more comfortable by adjusting temperature, dim the lighting, remove loud noises, close room curtains or shades.
 - c. If person is in bed, be sure linen is dry and free of wrinkles.
 - d. If the person leaks urine, change linens and give dry set of pajamas. You can use a water barrier pad under the person to limit the number of linen changes.

- e. If person has drainage tubes or a catheter, be sure he or she is not lying on the tube.
 - f. Help the person turn on their side or lay on their back in a position of comfort. Offer extra pillows.
 - g. Use pillows to raise the lower legs but **do not place them right under the knees** to cut off circulation.
 - h. Loose any tight waistbands on clothing or straighten any tight or rolled socks.
 - i. After giving a pain medicine, try simple relaxation exercises and slow deep breathing. Meditation is another option to help the person fall asleep. **See our Lesson on Relaxation Exercises.**
14. About a ½ hour after giving a pain medicine, go back and ask if the person feels any better. Have any of the expressions or behaviors showing pain gone away?
15. Keep a pain diary. Write down your observations of the person's pain and take notes on what measures gave pain relief.