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NURSES IMPROVING CARE FOR HEALTHSYSTEM ELDERS

Need to Know for Patients and Families

*What patients
and their
families need to
know before
hospitalization
or a nursing
home admission*



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Pain

Why Is It Important? Pain is very common among older adults and has many causes: arthritis, injuries, surgery and disease. Pain can affect quality of life and is associated with depression, poor sleep, and decreased mobility. Pain may contribute to falls, lack of appetite, and slower recovery from injury. Due to decreased mobility related to pain, in the hospital and other healthcare facilities, older adults may be at increased risk for blood clots, pneumonia, and greater dependency with daily activities and overall function.

What You Can Do:

1. Report any pain you experience to your healthcare provider. Include change in function, loss of appetite, poor sleep, lack of energy, or anything else you may notice that was not part of daily life prior to the pain. Remember, pain is not a normal part of aging.
2. Keep track of your pain. When did it start? Where do you have pain? Describe the pain. Is it sharp or dull? How long does it last? Does it come and go or is it constant? What makes it better? What makes it worse? Are there any other symptoms in addition to you pain?
3. There are a number of ways to measure pain. Ask to be assessed for pain intensity.
4. Ask your healthcare providers about the best strategies to relieve your pain. Examples include:
 - Non-medication strategies: Deep breathing, meditation, massage, use of hot/cold compresses
 - A calm, relaxing environment: Dim light, music, imageryMedication: Talk to your provider about what is the best medication for your type of pain, how the medication will react with your current medications, what are side effects, and how long you should be on the medication.
5. Report changes in pain during management. Treatment options may be adjusted as pain decreases or increases.

What Caregivers Can Do:

1. Tell your loved one's doctor or nurse if you think he or she cannot recognize or report the pain themselves
2. Make sure you and other caregivers are included in decisions about pain management for your loved one
3. If drugs are prescribed, ask if they are appropriate for older adults, how the person will react to the medications they are already on, what are the side effects and how long the patient should be on the medication.
4. Monitor your loved one and report to his or her provider any changes in the management of their pain. Treatments should be adjusted to ensure adequate pain control.