

Answers to Patient Questions on Postoperative Pain

Q:

How much pain will I feel after surgery?

A:

This will depend on several things, including:

- The type of surgery you're going to have
- Your experiences with pain
- Your ability to tolerate pain
- Your mood and personality

Whatever the amount of pain you have after your procedure, it's important to know that pain after surgery can be successfully managed.

Q:

Isn't it good for me to feel pain?

A:

No. Pain offers no known benefits; untreated pain can hinder healing. In fact, it's best to treat pain even before it starts.

Q:

If I feel pain after surgery, how will it be treated?

A:

Immediately after surgery, you may receive patient-controlled analgesia (PCA), a special pump that provides pain medication intravenously (through the veins). PCA enables people to control the amount of medication they receive.

When you are ready for oral medications, the types of pain medications you may receive will partly depend upon what kinds of medications you are taking before surgery, as well as upon what kind of pain you're likely to feel from your procedure.

Moderate to severe pain may be treated with strong analgesics. These pain medications are available in immediate-release and controlled-release formulations. Controlled-release medications provide sustained analgesia for an extended period of time (up to 12 hours). In addition, controlled-release analgesics usually do not need to be taken as frequently as immediate-release medications.

NSAIDs (nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs) usually are given for mild to moderate pain. You may be already familiar with NSAIDs such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Most NSAIDs are effective in reducing inflammation, swelling, or irritation that may accompany wounds.

Aside from medications, pain can be controlled through nondrug methods. For example, you may find that massage or certain relaxation techniques reduce pain. In either case, your doctor can recommend the best treatment for you.

Q:

If I take pain medications, will I have any side effects from them?

A:

It depends in part upon the type of medication you're prescribed. Strong analgesics may cause constipation or nausea. In such cases, your doctor may suggest taking a laxative for constipation or another kind of medication to ease nausea.

Alternatively, NSAIDs may also cause stomach irritation, which may be prevented by taking them with food or by using antacids.