



FAST FACTS: Pain Management in Nursing Homes

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes is a national campaign to improve the quality of care and life for the country's 1.5 million people receiving care in nursing homes. Nursing homes, their staff and consumers can join this effort by working on the campaign goals, designed to improve quality. This consumer fact sheet provides information on how to manage pain effectively and safely in a nursing home.

How to recognize when a resident is in pain

Pain is an unpleasant experience that affects many parts of a person's life. Pain can come on suddenly from an injury such as a bruise or broken bone. It may also be chronic as in a disease like arthritis or cancer. Some people have both kinds of pain.

Pain is difficult to measure and treat. Residents with pain can be depressed, sleepless, restless, distressed or lose their appetite. Treating pain is important. If you don't treat pain, it can make a person's health worse and decrease their activity and quality of life.

What is the best care for residents who have pain?

Consumers should make sure staff ask questions such as:

- Do you have pain?
- Describe your pain.
- What does it feel like?
- How bad is the pain? Is it pinching, dull and aching or sharp and stabbing?
- Do you have pain all the time?
- Does the pain come and go?
- What makes your pain better or worse?

Consumers should make sure staff monitor residents for signs of pain and observe how residents walk, move from the bed to a chair, eat and go about other daily activities.

Staff should also pay close attention to residents who can't talk or have dementia. These residents may moan, cry or scream when in pain. They may hold or rub a part of the body that hurts. Residents with pain may stop doing activities or change their routines.

Consumers should make sure staff try to find the cause of each resident's pain

- A physical examination should be done to identify the cause of the pain.
- Tests, including blood tests or x-rays, should be conducted if needed.

Consumers should make sure staff work with residents and families to treat pain

- Residents, families and caregivers should discuss pain in care planning meetings.
- Pain care planning should include nursing assistants who know the resident well. These caregivers can help identify and relieve pain (see Consistent Assignment Fact Sheet).

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes is a national campaign to improve the quality of care and life for the country's 1.5 million people receiving care in nursing homes. Find out if your nursing home is part of the Advancing Excellence Campaign. To sign up or get more information, go to www.nhqualitycampaign.org.



Consumers should make sure staff always treat each resident's pain

- Heat, cold, or massage can relieve pain.
- Drugs are also used to relieve pain. However, most pain drugs have side effects. These include: constipation, loss of appetite, listlessness, drowsiness, or confusion. Pain drugs can cause falls.
- Most side effects can be fairly well controlled. The rule of thumb with pain drugs is to start with the lowest dose and increase the dose slowly.

Consumers should make sure staff check frequently to make sure the pain is being relieved

- Staff should routinely ask residents if they are having pain and also ask residents or family members to report pain.
- Staff should recognize that not all residents will talk about pain or seek treatment for it.
- Men and women may report pain differently and religious beliefs and cultural traditions could affect how people talk about pain.
- Some residents, families and staff worry about drug side effects, addiction and dependency. Others fear bothering the nursing staff.
- Staff should be able to reassure families and residents about managing side effects and fears.

What questions should you ask staff about how they manage pain?

- How do you measure pain? How often?
- Do you keep a written record of each resident's pain?
- How do you involve residents and families in developing the care plan?
- How are you treating the pain? How do you know the treatment is working?
- What changes are made if pain is not relieved?
- What do you do about side effects from pain drugs?

Whom should you ask about pain relief?

The director of nursing and nursing home administrator can answer questions about how staff measure and treat pain. Go to the federal government's Nursing Home Compare Web site (<http://www.medicare.gov/nhcompare>) to find out how well a nursing home manages residents' pain.