Pain Relief After Surgery

Most people have some pain after surgery. It is important to keep pain under control to help with your recovery. Good pain control helps you feel comfortable, so you can take deep breaths, walk and sleep better. This can help lower the risk of complications such as pneumonia or blood clots after surgery.

Types of Medicine Used to Control Pain

After surgery, your doctor may order different kinds of medicine to help control your pain. These may include:

- **Pain medicines**: You may be given one or more different kinds of pain medicine. Some pain medicines are called opiates and others are known as NSAIDs.

- **Anti-anxiety medicines**: These medicines can help you feel less anxious and can help lessen your pain.

- **Anti-nausea medicines**: These medicines can calm your stomach and help to control nausea and vomiting.

Important Information

**Pain medicine may not get rid of all your pain.** It should keep your pain at a level that lets you move around, eat and breathe easily.

Pain medicines may be given as a pill or a liquid to swallow, a shot or through an IV line or an epidural catheter in the back.

To get the best pain control, do not wait until your pain gets worse or out of control. Tell your nurse if the pain does not ease or the pain comes back. Your nurse can talk with your doctor to see if your pain medicines can be adjusted.

Pain medicine can cause constipation. You will be given a stool softener medicine to help prevent constipation during your hospital stay.
Types of Pain Relief Options

**Spinal Analgesia**
The word analgesia means pain relief. Spinal Analgesia can help to control pain after surgery. After cleaning and numbing the skin, a needle is put into the spinal space below the spinal cord. (It does not go into your spinal cord.) When the needle is in the right place, you will be given an injection of pain medicine and then the needle is removed.

Rare side effects may include: headaches, numbness or tingling in lower legs, back soreness, bleeding, allergic reaction, or infection.

**Epidural Analgesia**
Epidural analgesia is another way to give pain medicine after surgery. A very thin plastic tube called an epidural catheter is put into your back just before surgery. A small pump is attached to the epidural catheter. The pump gives a small amount of pain medicine through the catheter in your back at a set rate. The catheter is taped to your back and you will be able to move around in bed or walk. You can use epidural medicine until the pain has eased enough for you to take pain pills by mouth.

While you have the epidural in place, you may also have a tube in your bladder to drain your urine. This is called a Foley catheter.

A low blood pressure can be a common side effect from epidural analgesia. This can be treated by turning down the epidural medicine and giving IV fluids. Rare side effects from an epidural may include, headaches, bleeding, allergic reaction or infection.

**Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)**
Patient controlled analgesia (PCA) is a special pump with medicine that connects to your IV. When you feel pain, you push a button to get a measured dose of pain medicine. Your doctor orders the kind and amount of pain medicine to meet your needs. The pump is set so that you cannot give yourself too much medicine. This method is safe and puts you in control of your pain relief. You should be the only one who pushes the button, not your family members or friends. Too much narcotic pain medicine may cause you to be drowsy and slow down your breathing. Your nurse and doctor will work together to help control your pain and keep you comfortable.
Other Ways to Manage Your Pain

Here are other ways to help manage your pain. Planning ahead or practicing a pain control method can help you when you have pain.

- **Activity:** Start moving as soon as possible after surgery if your doctor says it is okay. Moving helps your breathing and digestion, and helps you heal faster. Moving and being active can help lessen pain over time.

- **Cold and Heat:** Both cold and heat can help lessen some types of pain. Some pain improves best using cold while other types of pain improve with moist heat. Talk to your nurse about which is best for your type of pain.

- **Deep Breathing:** Taking slow deep breaths can help you relax and lessen pain.

- **Distraction:** This method teaches you to focus your attention on something other than pain. Playing cards or games, talking and visiting with family may relax you and keep you from thinking about the pain. Watching TV or reading may also be helpful.

- **Music:** Whether you listen to music, sing or hum, or play an instrument, music can help you relax and help you breathe more deeply and slowly. It can also increase your energy and help change your mood.

- **Relaxation Techniques:** Stress and anxiety can make pain worse and may slow healing. Since it is hard to avoid stress, it can help to learn how to control stress. **Below are different ways to help you relax:**
  - Use extra pillows and blankets to stay in a comfortable position.
  - Make sure the room is the right temperature for you.
  - A massage of your back, hands or feet may help lessen your pain.
  - Try placing a cool cloth on your hands or face.
  - Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a place you find relaxing. Think about sounds or sights that you enjoy.

For more information, talk to your doctor or nurse. You may also ask for these other patient education materials:

- Pain Management
- Patient Controlled Analgesia
- Constipation and Opioid (Pain Medicine) Use