

ACUTE PAIN

Learning About Managing Acute Pain at Home

What is a pain management plan?

A pain management plan spells out ways you can deal with your pain at home. You and your care team will create this plan before you leave the hospital. The plan may include:

- The goals of your treatment. This may include how you can expect your pain and function to improve.
- The treatments your doctor suggests for your pain. These may include medicines, physical therapy, or relaxation exercises.
- Notes about how you and your care team will work together as you recover. Your team may include your doctor, a physical therapist, and an occupational therapist.
- A review of your treatment goals for pain and function.

Your feelings about how you want to manage your pain are important. Be open and honest when you talk with your doctor. This will help ensure that you get a plan that is safe and that works best for you.

Why is it important to follow your plan?

After you have an injury or surgery, a certain amount of pain is common and normal. But you can manage your pain after you leave the hospital.

The best way to do that is to follow your pain management plan. This will help keep you comfortable and able to do the things you want to do. It can also speed your recovery and help reduce the risk of problems.

What are the side effects of pain medicines?

All pain medicines—like acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and opioids—have side effects. They can include allergic reaction, rash, and upset stomach. Common side effects of opioids also include constipation and nausea. More serious effects include needing larger doses over time, getting sick if you suddenly stop taking the drug, addiction, and death.

How do you manage pain after you leave the hospital?

After you leave the hospital, the best way to benefit from your treatment is to take good care of yourself. Here are some ways to do that.

- Try nonmedical ways to relieve pain.

These ways include breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, meditation, and massage.

- Take your medicines or other treatments exactly as prescribed.

Let your doctor know if your pain isn't getting better.

- Pace yourself.

It might be hard to take it easy when you get home. But even simple activities can increase pain at first. Follow your doctor's instructions about when you can be active again and any activities you should avoid. When you do start getting back to your regular activities, start slowly.

- Arrange your home to help you recover.

Here are some ideas:

- Remove throw rugs to prevent falling.
 - Sleep close to the bathroom, or have a commode near your bed.
 - Have pillows near you so you can sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Use tools that may help.

Some devices may help you do your daily activities and be more mobile. These devices include walking canes, crutches, grab bars, and reachers.

- Try heat or cold.

Heat can soothe muscle pain and other aches. Cold can help with swelling.

- Get support.

Friends and relatives often want to help but don't know what to do. Let them know what you need. It will make them happy and will help you.

How do you take opioids safely?

Opioids can help you manage pain. But they can easily be misused. Misuse can lead to more problems like addiction and even death. Because of this, it is best to get off them as soon as possible. As soon as you don't need them, talk to your doctor about how to safely stop taking them.

If you need to take opioids to manage pain, this advice can help you stay safe.

- Take opioids exactly as directed.

Follow the directions carefully. It's easy to misuse opioids if you take a dose other than what's prescribed by your doctor. Even sharing them with someone they were not meant for is misuse.

- Do not drive or operate machinery.

Opioids may affect your judgment and decision making. Talk with your doctor about when it is safe to drive.

- Avoid alcohol, sleeping medicines, and muscle relaxers.

Opioids can be dangerous if you take them with alcohol or with certain drugs. This includes over-the-counter medicines. Make sure your doctor knows about all the other

medicines you take. Don't start any new medicines before you talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

- Ask your doctor about a naloxone rescue kit.

It can help you—and even save your life—if you take too much of an opioid.

How do you safely store opioid pills and patches?

It's important to store opioids safely so that they aren't used by the wrong person. Your pain medicine is only for you to take. If someone else takes your medicine, it can harm that person.

You can safely store your medicine. Follow these tips.

- Store pills and patches up high and out of sight.
 - Keep them away from children and pets.
 - Return the container to the same place each time you take your medicine.
- Try locking your opioid medicine in a cabinet.
- Make sure the bottles are closed tightly.

If they have a safety cap, make sure that it's locked. Tighten the cap until you hear a click or can't twist it anymore.

- Keep track of how many pills or patches you have left.

You may want to keep track in a notebook.

- Let the people who live with you know about your medicine.
 - Tell them that it is only for you to take.
 - If guests have opioid medicine with them, ask them to keep it safe.

How do you get rid of opioid pills and patches safely?

If you have opioid pills or patches that you aren't going to use, get rid of them right away. It's also important to get rid of used opioid patches.

When you get rid of these medicines safely, you take away any chance that a person or an animal might get sick from one of them.

Follow one of these steps. If you can't do the first step, then take the next step.

- Bring them to a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-authorized medicine take-back program or drop-off box.
 - Your local trash and recycle center, pharmacy, or hospital may offer one of these.
- Throw the medicines in the trash.

Take this step if you can't get to a take-back program or drop-off box and the medicine's instructions do not have specific disposal information.

- Take the medicine out of its container.
- Mix it with something that tastes bad, like cat litter or coffee grounds.

- Place the mixture in a sealed plastic bag and put the bag in your household trash.
- Flush them down the sink or toilet.
 - You can flush your medicine down the toilet or sink **only** if you can't go to a DEA-approved site or if your medicine's instructions specifically say to.
 - If you are throwing away a patch, first fold the sticky sides together.
 - To see a list of medicines that should be flushed, go to:
www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **P175** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Managing Acute Pain at Home.**"

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CHRONIC PAIN

Chronic Pain: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Chronic pain is pain that lasts a long time (months or even years) and may or may not have a clear cause. It is different from acute pain, which usually does have a clear cause—like an injury or illness—and gets better over time. Chronic pain:

- Lasts over time but may vary from day to day.
- Does not go away despite efforts to end it.
- May disrupt your sleep and lead to fatigue.
- May cause depression or anxiety.
- May make your muscles tense, causing more pain.
- Can disrupt your work, hobbies, home life, and relationships with friends and family.

Chronic pain is a very real condition. It is not just in your head. Treatment can help and usually includes several methods used together, such as medicines, physical therapy, exercise, and other treatments. Learning how to relax and changing negative thought patterns can also help you cope.

Chronic pain is complex. Taking an active role in your treatment will help you better manage your pain. Tell your doctor if you have trouble dealing with your pain. You may have to try several things before you find what works best for you.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Pace yourself. Break up large jobs into smaller tasks. Save harder tasks for days when you have less pain, or go back and forth between hard tasks and easier ones. Take rest breaks.
- Relax, and reduce stress. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation can help.
- Keep moving. Gentle, daily exercise can help reduce pain over the long run. Try low- or no-impact exercises such as walking, swimming, and stationary biking. Do stretches to stay flexible.
- Try heat, cold packs, and massage.
- Get enough sleep. Chronic pain can make you tired and drain your energy. Talk with your doctor if you have trouble sleeping because of pain.
- Think positive. Your thoughts can affect your pain level. Do things that you enjoy to distract yourself when you have pain instead of focusing on the pain. See a movie, read a book, listen to music, or spend time with a friend.
- If you think you are depressed, talk to your doctor about treatment.
- Keep a daily pain diary. Record how your moods, thoughts, sleep patterns, activities, and medicine affect your pain. You may find that your pain is worse during or after certain

activities or when you are feeling a certain emotion. Having a record of your pain can help you and your doctor find the best ways to treat your pain.

- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.

Reducing constipation caused by pain medicine

- Include fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains in your diet each day. These foods are high in fiber.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. Walking is a good choice. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk every day. Try for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- Schedule time each day for a bowel movement. A daily routine may help. Take your time and do not strain when having a bowel movement.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your pain gets worse or is out of control.
- You feel down or blue, or you do not enjoy things like you once did. You may be depressed, which is common in people with chronic pain. Depression can be treated.
- You have vomiting or cramps for more than 2 hours.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You cannot sleep because of pain.
- You are very worried or anxious about your pain.
- You have trouble taking your pain medicine.
- You have any concerns about your pain medicine.
- You have trouble with bowel movements, such as:
 - No bowel movement in 3 days.
 - Blood in the anal area, in your stool, or on the toilet paper.
 - Diarrhea for more than 24 hours.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **N004** in the search box to learn more about "**Chronic Pain: Care Instructions**."

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CANCER PAIN

Learning About Cancer Pain

What is cancer pain?

Cancer pain may be caused by the cancer or by the treatments and tests used. The pain may make it hard for you to do your normal activities, such as sleeping or eating. Over time, cancer pain can cause appetite and sleep problems, isolation, and depression.

But most cancer pain can be managed with medicines and other methods. This may not mean that you have no pain but that it stays at a level that you can bear. Treating your pain will make you feel better. You will be more active, eat and sleep better, and enjoy your family and friends.

What are some key points about cancer pain?

- You are the only person who can say how much pain you have. If you tell your doctor when you have pain or when pain changes, your doctor can help you.
- Cancer pain can almost always be relieved if you work with your doctor to create a treatment plan that is right for you.
- Pain is often easier to control right after it starts. This may mean it is better to take regular doses instead of waiting until the pain becomes bad.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- You may find that taking your medicine works most of the time, but your pain flares up during extra activity or for no clear reason. This is called breakthrough pain. Ask your doctor what you can do if this happens. Your doctor can give you a prescription for fast-acting medicines that you can take for breakthrough pain.
- People who take cancer pain medicines rarely become addicted to them. Your body may come to expect daily doses of medicine to control the pain. But your doctor can gradually lower the amount you are taking when and if the cause of your pain is gone.

What treatments can help you manage cancer pain?

Medical treatments to manage cancer pain include:

- Prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Many types of medicines are used. Your doctor may suggest different combinations of medicines.
- Surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy. These may be used to remove or destroy a tumor that is causing pain.
- Nerve blocks. These are used to help with nerve pain. A medicine is injected into the nerve that affects the painful area.

Nonmedical treatments include:

- Physical therapy, gentle massage, acupuncture, and heat or cold to ease pain.
- Stretching, yoga, and exercises to help you keep your strength, flexibility, and mobility.
- Relaxation, biofeedback, or meditation to relieve stress and anxiety.

- Short-term crisis therapy with a counselor. This may help you manage your cancer pain or the discomfort from cancer treatments.
- Education and emotional support. Learning as much as you can about your pain may help. So can sharing your feelings with others. A support group can be a safe and comfortable place to talk about your illness.
- Complementary therapies, such as aromatherapy, prayer, and humor therapy, may be helpful.

How can you manage cancer pain?

Your doctor needs all the information you can give about what your pain feels like. It often helps to write things down in a pain diary.

- Write down when your pain starts, what it feels like, and how long it lasts. Use words like dull, aching, sharp, shooting, throbbing, or burning.
- Note changes in your pain. Is it constant, or does it come and go? Do you have more than one kind of pain? How long does it last?
- Rate your pain on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you can imagine.
- Write exactly where you feel pain. You can use a drawing. Say whether the pain is just in that one place or several places at once. Or tell your doctor if it travels from one place to another.
- Write down what makes your pain better or worse. Note when you used a treatment, how well it worked, and any side effects.

If you and your doctor are not able to control your pain, ask about seeing a pain specialist. A pain specialist is a health professional who focuses on treating resistant pain.

Talk to your doctor if you are having problems with depression. Treating depression can make it easier to manage your cancer pain.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **K531** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Cancer Pain.**"

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NEUROPATHIC PAIN

Neuropathic Pain: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Neuropathic pain is caused by pressure on or damage to your nerves. It's often simply called nerve pain. Some people feel this type of pain all the time. For others, it comes and goes.

Diabetes, shingles, or an injury can cause nerve pain. Many people say the pain feels sharp, burning, or stabbing. But some people feel it as a dull ache. In some cases, it makes your skin very sensitive. So touch, pressure, and other sensations that did not hurt before may now cause pain.

It's important to know that this kind of pain is real and can affect your quality of life. It's also important to know that treatment can help. Treatment includes pain medicines, exercise, and physical therapy.

Medicines can help reduce the number of pain signals that travel over the nerves. This can make the painful areas less sensitive. It can also help you sleep better and improve your mood. But medicines are only one part of successful treatment.

Most people do best with more than one kind of treatment. Your doctor may recommend that you try cognitive-behavioral therapy and stress management. Or, if needed, you may decide to try to quit smoking, lower your blood pressure, or better control blood sugar. These kinds of healthy changes can also make a difference.

If you feel that your treatment is not working, talk to your doctor. And be sure to tell your doctor if you think you might be depressed or anxious. These are common problems that can also be treated.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Save hard tasks for days when you have less pain. Follow a hard task with an easy task. And remember to take breaks.
- Relax, and reduce stress. You may want to try deep breathing or meditation. These can help.
- Keep moving. Gentle, daily exercise can help reduce pain. Your doctor or physical therapist can tell you what type of exercise is best for you. This may include walking, swimming, and stationary biking. It may also include stretches and range-of-motion exercises.
- Try heat, cold packs, and massage.

- Get enough sleep. Constant pain can make you more tired. If the pain makes it hard to sleep, talk with your doctor.
- Think positively. Your thoughts can affect your pain. Do fun things to distract yourself from the pain. See a movie, read a book, listen to music, or spend time with a friend.
- Keep a pain diary. Try to write down how strong your pain is and what it feels like. Also try to notice and write down how your moods, thoughts, sleep, activities, and medicine affect your pain. These notes can help you and your doctor find the best ways to treat your pain.

Reducing constipation caused by pain medicine

Pain medicines often cause constipation. To reduce constipation:

- Include fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains in your diet each day. These foods are high in fiber.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Get some exercise every day. Build up slowly to 30 to 60 minutes a day on 5 or more days of the week.
- Take a fiber supplement, such as Citrucel or Metamucil, every day if needed. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- Schedule time each day for a bowel movement. Having a daily routine may help. Take your time and do not strain when having a bowel movement.
- Ask your doctor about a laxative. The goal is to have one easy bowel movement every 1 to 2 days. Do not let constipation go untreated for more than 3 days.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You feel sad, anxious, or hopeless for more than a few days. This could mean you are depressed. Depression is common in people who have a lot of pain. But it can be treated.
- You have trouble with bowel movements, such as:
 - No bowel movement in 3 days.
 - Blood in the anal area, in your stool, or on the toilet paper.
 - Diarrhea for more than 24 hours.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your pain is getting worse.
- You can't sleep because of pain.
- You are very worried or anxious about your pain.
- You have trouble taking your pain medicine.
- You have any concerns about your pain medicine or its side effects.
- You have vomiting or cramps for more than 2 hours.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **L661** in the search box to learn more about "**Neuropathic Pain: Care Instructions.**"

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MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN

Musculoskeletal Pain: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Different problems with the bones, muscles, nerves, ligaments, and tendons in the body can cause pain. One or more areas of your body may ache or burn. Or they may feel tired, stiff, or sore.

The medical term for this type of pain is musculoskeletal pain. It can have many different causes.

Sometimes the pain is caused by an injury such as a strain or sprain. Or you might have pain from using one part of your body in the same way over and over again. This is called overuse.

In some cases, the cause of the pain is another health problem such as arthritis or fibromyalgia.

The doctor will examine you and ask you questions about your health to help find the cause of your pain. Blood tests or imaging tests like an X-ray may also be helpful. But sometimes doctors can't find a cause of the pain.

Treatment depends on your symptoms and the cause of the pain, if known.

The doctor has checked you carefully, but problems can develop later. If you notice any problems or new symptoms, **get medical treatment right away**.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Rest until you feel better.
- Do not do anything that makes the pain worse. Return to exercise gradually if you feel better and your doctor says it's okay.
- Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Put ice or a cold pack on the area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time to ease pain. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new pain, or your pain gets worse.
- You have new symptoms such as a fever, a rash, or chills.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **Q624** in the search box to learn more about "**Musculoskeletal Pain: Care Instructions.**"

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CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT

Learning About Managing Chronic Pain

What is a plan for pain management?

A pain management plan helps you find ways to control pain with side effects you can live with. Some diseases and injuries can cause pain that lasts a long time. Constant pain can make you depressed. It can cause stress and make it hard for you to eat and sleep. But you don't need to live with uncontrolled pain.

How can you plan for managing your pain?

You and your doctor will work to make your plan. Your plan can include more than one type of pain control. You may take prescription or over-the-counter drugs. You can also try physical treatments, like massage and acupuncture. Other things can help too, such as meditation or a type of therapy to change how you think about your pain.

It's important to let your doctor know how you prefer to control your pain. Sometimes the goal of a pain management plan isn't to totally get rid of pain. Instead, it might be to reduce the pain enough that daily activities are easier.

If your pain isn't controlled well enough, talk with your doctor. You may need to make a new plan. Or your doctor may refer you to a specialist.

What medicines are used?

Your doctor may prescribe medicine to help with your pain. If you aren't taking a prescription medicine, you may be able to take an over-the-counter one. Here are the main types of medicine for chronic pain.

- **Non-opioids.** These are things like acetaminophen, such as Tylenol, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as Advil.
- **Opioids.** Morphine, codeine, and oxycodone are some examples.
- **Other medicines.** Antidepressants and anti-seizure medicines may be used. These medicines seem to change the way your brain senses pain. Another option may be a nerve block injection.

Medicines are the most common treatment for pain. But to feel better, you'll need to do more than take medicine. You can also do things like reducing your stress level and changing how you think.

How can you take medicine safely?

Medicines can help you get better. But they can also be dangerous, especially if you don't take them the right way. Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.

If the medicine you take causes side effects such as constipation or nausea, you may need to take other medicines for those problems. Talk to your doctor about any side effects you have.

If you were prescribed an opioid pain reliever, your care team will give you information on how to use it safely. You will also get directions for how to safely store the medicine and how to get rid of any that's left over. Follow these instructions carefully.

What physical treatments can help?

Physical treatments can be an important part of managing chronic pain. You may find that combining more than one treatment helps the most.

These treatments can include:

- **Heat or cold.** This can help arthritis, sore muscles, and other aches.
- **Hydrotherapy.** It uses flowing water to relax muscles.
- **Massage.** Massage involves rubbing the soft tissues of the body. It eases tension and pain.
- **Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).** This treatment uses a gentle electric current applied to the skin for pain relief.
- **Acupuncture.** This is a form of traditional Chinese medicine. It uses very thin needles inserted into certain points of the body.
- **Physical therapy.** This treatment uses stretches and exercises to reduce pain and help you move better.

If you get physical therapy, make sure to do any home exercises or stretching your therapist has prescribed. Stay as active as you can. Try to get some physical activity every day.

What other things can help?

You can manage chronic pain by using things other than medicines or physical treatments. For example, you can keep track of your pain in a pain diary. It can help you understand how the things you do affect your pain.

Reducing stress and tension can reduce pain. And being more aware of your thought patterns can be helpful. In some cases, shifting how you think about pain can affect how you feel.

Here are some options to think about:

- **Breathing exercises and meditation.** These techniques can help you focus your attention, relax, and get rid of tension.
- **Guided imagery.** This is a series of thoughts and images that can focus your attention away from your pain.
- **Hypnosis.** It's a state of focused concentration that makes you less aware of your surroundings.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy.** This type of counseling helps you change your thought patterns.
- **Yoga.** Stretching and exercises can reduce stress and improve flexibility.

If what you're doing to control your pain isn't working, or if you're feeling depressed, talk to your doctor. He or she can help you change your pain management plan and find resources for emotional support.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **P119** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Managing Chronic Pain.**"

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SPINAL CORD STIMULATION

Learning About Spinal Cord Stimulation

What is it?

Spinal cord stimulation is a treatment for chronic pain. It uses a mild electrical current. It's mostly used for low back pain, pain in the arms and legs, and pain in the trunk.

A small generator is placed in your body. It sends electrical pulses to a tiny electrode near your spinal cord. You may feel a tingle from the pulses. The pulses can help relieve pain.

Why is it done?

This treatment may be done for people with severe, chronic pain who have:

- Had back surgery that didn't help their pain.
- Pain from a nerve problem.
- Pain that does not respond to other treatments. This includes complex regional pain syndrome.
- Pain from severe peripheral vascular disease that the doctor feels cannot be treated with surgery.

If this treatment is right for you, you may have a spinal cord stimulator implanted for long-term use.

How is it done?

Spinal cord stimulation is done in two steps. Your doctor will first insert a temporary electrode through your skin. It will stay there for about a week. This first step is to see if the treatment will help your pain.

You and your doctor will test different stimulation settings and programs. Your doctor will ask you how you feel at different settings. Let your doctor know if you feel any discomfort.

You'll use a wireless remote control or other controller.

If the test works, you may get a permanent stimulator. The electrode is implanted in your spine. A lead wire runs from your spine to a small generator. It can be under the skin in your lower or upper back, buttock area, chest, or belly area.

You may get medicine that relaxes you or puts you in a light sleep. Some people may need to have general anesthesia. The areas being worked on will be numb.

After the stimulator is placed, your doctor will show you how to care for the areas where you had surgery. Follow your doctor's instructions. If you notice any signs of infection, call your doctor right away. These signs include pain, swelling, warmth or redness around the area, pus draining from the area, or a fever.

What are the different types of spinal cord stimulators?

This treatment targets the area of your body where you feel pain. There are different types of devices you may get.

- The devices can have different power sources.

- Some generators have batteries that need to be replaced every 3 to 5 years. Some last longer.
- Some have rechargeable batteries. A special wireless charger may come with your system. These last much longer. But they still may need to be replaced at some point.
- Some stimulators may have a power source outside your body. These are more often for short-term use.
- The leads that carry the electrical current can be placed at different spots along the spinal cord.
- You will have a controller to program the device. Your doctor will show you how to use it.

How can you learn to live with a spinal cord stimulator?

You may have a spinal cord stimulator for many years. It can help you live with much less pain, but you will have to learn how to use it.

After the surgery, you and your doctor can figure out the best pulse strength. It may need to be adjusted a few times. Your doctor will show you how to use the stimulator at home.

You may feel a tingle or some warmth while you use electrical nerve stimulation.

Your doctor will show you how to be safe with a stimulator. This may include trying not to lift, bend, stretch, or twist too much. Being too active could move or disconnect the leads. Light exercise, such as walking, is good.

After a few weeks, you will be able to move more. You may get important instructions on driving and air travel, as well.

Your device may set off metal detectors. And anti-theft devices in stores can cause a burst of stimulation.

Be sure to tell other doctors about your stimulator before you have any other procedures or scans. Some scans and procedures can cause serious problems with your device.

What are the risks?

There are some risks to spinal cord stimulation. For example:

- Placing the stimulator requires surgery. Surgery has risks, such as the risk of bleeding, infection, or fluid buildup at the surgical site. Anesthesia also has some risks.
- The stimulator device and wires can fail. The wires may also move, so the stimulator doesn't work as well as it should.
- The tingling or warm feeling from the electrical current may bother you. You may need the device removed if it bothers you too much.
- If you build up a tolerance to the stimulation, your doctor may need to change the amount of current or placement of the wires.
- Your pain may come back, and the device may no longer work for you.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **S115** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Spinal Cord Stimulation.**"

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MYALGIA

Muscle Aches: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Muscle aches have many possible causes. Some common ones are overuse, tension, and injuries such as a strained muscle. An infection such as the flu can cause muscle aches. Or the aches may be caused by some medicines, such as antipsychotics. Muscle aches may also be a symptom of a disease like lupus or fibromyalgia. Myalgia is the medical term for muscle aches.

The doctor will do a physical exam and ask questions to try to find what is causing your pain. You may also have tests such as blood tests or imaging tests like X-rays. These can help find or rule out serious problems.

The doctor has checked you carefully, but problems can develop later. If you notice any problems or new symptoms, **get medical treatment right away**.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Rest the area that hurts. You may need to stop or reduce the activity that causes your symptoms. Then you can return to it slowly.
- Put ice or a cold pack on the area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time to ease pain. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Take an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your pain gets worse.
- You have new symptoms, such as a fever, swelling, or a rash.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to MyUNC at <https://myuncchart.org>.

Select Preferences in the upper right hand corner, then select Health Library under Resources. Enter **G355** in the search box to learn more about "**Muscle Aches: Care Instructions**."

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Optional Videos:

- Back Pain Needs Time - Activity - and Medicine: Video (English) (Spanish)
- Back Pain: Getting In and Out of Bed: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Chronic Pain: Finding Your Strength: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Chronic Pain: How Medicines Can Help You Manage It: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Chronic Pain: Managing Pain With Healthy Thinking: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Heat or Ice for Low Back Pain: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Living With Chronic Pain: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Low Back Pain: Keep Moving: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Proper Lifting to Protect Your Back: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Proper Sitting and Lifting for a Healthy Back: Video ([English](#)) ([Spanish](#))