

HOW IS PAIN TREATED?

Pain falls into two basic categories: the kind that requires an operation and the kind that does not. Most cases do not require surgery. Treatment for pain generally depends on what kind of pain you experience: acute or chronic.

Acute Pain Acute pain usually gets better on its own, although you may want to try acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help ease the pain. Exercises are not usually advisable for acute pain. Moderate to severe pain due to trauma, as well as even mild abdominal/chest/head pains may need an evaluation by a physician to look for more serious conditions.

Chronic Pain

Hot or cold packs: Heat dilates the blood vessels, improving the supply of oxygen that the blood takes to the treated area and reducing muscle spasms. Cold reduces inflammation.

Exercise: Although exercise is usually not advisable for acute pain, proper exercise can help ease chronic pain and perhaps reduce its risk of returning. The goal of stretching exercises is to stretch muscles and other soft tissues. This can reduce stiffness and improve range of motion.

Analgesic medications: Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is most commonly used for mild pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are drugs that relieve both pain and inflammation. NSAIDs include ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and many other prescription and nonprescription products.

Narcotics are best reserved for short-term severe pain or pain after surgery.

People with muscular pain or arthritis pain that is not relieved by oral medications may find topical analgesics helpful. These creams, ointments, and salves are rubbed directly onto the skin over the site of pain. They use a variety of ingredients to increase blood flow or ease pain and include such products as Icy Hot, Ben Gay, and Zostrix.

Muscle relaxants and certain antidepressants may also be prescribed for chronic pain.

There are other treatment modalities in use, with varying evidence supporting their effectiveness.

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