



# Managing your pain

Things you can do today  
for a **better** tomorrow



# This booklet offers some tips on things you can do today to help manage your pain.

No one plans to get hurt at work. When accidents happen however, the injury often causes pain. Because each person is an individual and experiences pain differently, finding relief from pain requires a variety of therapies.

Optum is a pharmacy benefit manager (PBM). We have been hired to help manage the medicine(s) you are taking for your work-related injury. It is important to us that your medication therapy is safe and effective.

We also believe it is important for you to have an understanding of your medications and medication therapy. In this brochure you will find information and tips to better understand using pain medications.

## 1 LEARN

The more you know about your injury and treatment, the better you can manage your pain along with your doctor's help.

## 2 MANAGE

There are a variety of things you can do to help make sure your medicine therapy is safe and effective.

## 3 SHARE

You are surrounded by a team of medical and claim professionals who want you to get well. Talking about the pain you are experiencing will help these individuals treat your injury.

## 4 LIVE

Taking an active role in managing your pain, while following your doctor's orders, is important and can lead to better quality of life and support returning to work.

# 1

# LEARN

The more you know about your injury and treatment, the better you can manage your pain.

## Your injury

Understanding your injury at a basic level is important to managing your pain. Ask your doctor questions to learn more about your injury and the best path to recovery. Know what parts of your body are affected as sometimes it isn't obvious. Your injury might also affect other areas. Find out if you are at risk for further damage to the affected part of the body. Understand what activities you can and cannot do, and for how long.

## Your pain

Pain is an uncomfortable or unpleasant feeling in your body. When you feel pain, your body is telling you something may be wrong. Pain may be caused by an injury or a medical condition. However, sometimes the cause is unknown or undetermined. Pain may be categorized based on how long and how often you experience it. Ask your doctor for information about how your body experiences pain, so you can manage your recovery and any associated pain, in the best way possible.

### ACUTE PAIN (SHORT-TERM)

- Begins suddenly or at the time of injury
- May last for seconds, hours, weeks or a few months
- Rarely last longer than three months
- May be a warning of disease or continued threat of bodily harm
- Usually stops when the cause of the pain has been treated or has healed
- May be caused by things, including:
  - Surgery
  - Broken Bones
  - Dental Work
  - Burns or cuts

### CHRONIC PAIN (LONG-TERM)

- May last for months or years
- May be related to an ongoing medical condition or an injury involving the nerves
- May continue even after the cause of the pain has been treated, healed or removed
- Common chronic pain includes:
  - Headaches
  - Low-back pain
  - Joint pain
  - Nerve pain

## Your treatments

When pain is acute it is often initially treated using medicine(s). Understanding your medicine(s) and why you are taking them is important.

### Know your medicine

- What is your medicine's name?
- Why you are taking it?
- What it is supposed to do or change in your body?
- How should it make you feel?
- How should it not make you feel?
- What are your options?
- How much, how often, and for how long will you be taking your medicine?
- How might your medicine interact with other vitamins, supplements, or medicine(s) you are taking for non-injury conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes?
- Keep and read all the materials that come with your medicine. This will help make sure you use your medicine safely and effectively.

### Opioid analgesics

Opioid analgesics have an important place in medication therapy for the treatment of pain. However, careful consideration of the risks and benefits associated with their use must occur, because opioid analgesics can have an adverse effect on the body.

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Allergic reactions
- Sexual dysfunction
- Problems with intimacy
- Chronic constipation
- Social isolation
- Heart attack
- Muscle weakness
- Sleep disruption
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Kidney injury
- Death
- Decreased breathing rate
- Lethargy
- Hormone imbalance
- Addiction
- Urinary tract infections
- Slurred speech

## 2

# MANAGE

There are a variety of things you can do to help make sure your medicine is working safe and effectively.

### **Your medicine is prescribed for you and not others**

The medicine and the directions for use, as prescribed by your doctor, are unique to you, your injury and your pain. While helpful for you, it may not be helpful for a friend or relative. They are not you and they do not have your injury, or your pain. Please keep your medicine to yourself, storing it in a secure and safe place, away from children and pets.

### **Take your medicine as prescribed**

Medicine works best when taken in the right amount, at the times your doctor prescribed. Skipping prescribed doses may be an unhealthy pattern to develop and may lead to unexpected discomfort. Taking medicines more often than prescribed can result in dependency or resistance to the medicine, making it less helpful in managing your pain or leading to recovery. Be sure to take medicine with food, if told to do so. If your medicine makes you feel bad or sick, call your doctor or pharmacist right away.



## **Describe your pain with your doctor and other providers**

Pain can be hard to describe because it is subjective in nature and it can be difficult for doctors to understand your pain because it is clearly different for everyone. If you can describe your pain in detail, your doctor will better understand. Below are a few tips to help you talk to your doctor about your pain.

- Rate your pain on a scale of one (a little bit of pain) to 10 (the worst pain you can imagine).
- Use descriptive words like: burning, stabbing, tingling
- Address your concerns about pain.
- Keep a pain diary
  - Note if your pain is worse in the morning, afternoon or night and what causes you pain.
  - Track your pain score several times weekly.
  - List any home treatments that have worked for you.
  - List all over-the-counter or prescribed medications you have tried.
  - Describe how your pain may limit your activities.
  - Keep track of what activities make your pain better or worse.
  - Use a smartphone app to help with this.
- Talk about what you can and cannot do. Describe how the pain affects your daily activities. For example: "It keeps me from walking and shopping."

### **Track your progress**

Record your daily medicines and the details of how you feel. Track your daily activities, including foods eaten, amount of water consumed, medications taken, and amount of exercise. This will help you begin to see trends in the way you feel each day. This information helps both you and your doctor understand and manage your symptoms and treatment plan. Remember to take your journal with you to your doctor's visit too.

- **What can you do today that you couldn't do yesterday?**
- **What activities can you do with little or no pain?**

You can find a recovery journal, pain journals or other resources online.

# 3

# SHARE

A team of medical and claim professionals want you to get well. Talking with these individuals about the pain you are experiencing is helpful in understanding.

## **Talk with your doctor**

Your doctor is an advocate on your recovery journey.

- Keep your doctor informed of all the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter pain relievers, vitamins, herbal or nutritional supplements.
- Ask if there are any activity restrictions while taking your medicine, such as not driving or staying out of the sun. Restrictions exist to keep you safe.
- Let your doctor know what causes you pain and what helps relieve it. Track in your journal and share.
- Discuss the possible risks, benefits, and side effects of your medication therapy so you know what to expect. This includes talking about what happens when you are finished taking the medicine,
  - Know how the medicine makes you feel.
  - Understand if your medicine can be addictive.
  - Opioid pain medicines prescribed for injuries and surgeries can be especially addictive. If you have concerns about using these medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist about options.
- Discuss concerns about your medicine.
- For tips to help you better communicate with your doctor, visit [theacpa.org/Communication-Tools](http://theacpa.org/Communication-Tools).



## Talk with your pharmacist

Pharmacists are experts in medication therapy. Their knowledge and experience can be helpful especially in areas around:

- Knowing what to do if your medicine causes a reaction you do not anticipate.
- Any restrictions while using the medicine, such as avoiding alcohol or the use of machinery.
- If the restrictions cause concern, ask if there are other medicine(s) you may take. Restrictions exist to keep you safe.
- Share any concerns you have about how the medicine might interact with vitamins, supplements, or other medicines you are taking that do not relate to your injury.
  - Always be honest with your pharmacist about your medicine use.
  - Some medicine combinations can produce unexpected or unpleasant side effects.
- Understanding addictive issues and concerns.
- Symptoms of dependence can begin in just a few days when starting on certain medicines.
- Check on the side effects and symptoms of your medicines and know the signs of dependence.
- By being aware, you keep yourself and those around you safe.
- Schedule time with your pharmacist so they can be dedicated to your questions.



Taking an active role in managing your pain, while following your doctor's orders, is important.

### **Eat healthy**

A healthy diet provides your body with the nutrition needed to heal an injury. With proper nutrition, your internal body functions are strengthened. A balanced diet focusing on nutrient-rich foods, low in sodium, and of the right serving size, can also help maintain a healthy weight, which is sometimes a factor when an injury is sustained. Ask your doctor if there are foods to avoid, or if there are foods that can help when eaten.

### **Stay hydrated**

It is important to keep your body hydrated. Some medicines, like opioids, can slow your digestion. Staying hydrated flushes your system and helps you avoid constipation. Water helps keep your muscles and joints strong. Staying hydrated also prevents headaches, fatigue, muscle weakness, and pain. Be sure to stay hydrated when taking your medicine if the instructions tell you to. If you have a heart condition or other underlying medical condition, be sure to talk with your doctor before changing your diet or fluid consumption.

### **Keep active**

Inactivity due to injury may cause other parts of your body to weaken. This may lead to other injuries or exacerbate your current injury. Low-impact exercises help maintain muscle strength and foster recovery.

- Exercising in water helps decrease stress on the body
- Yoga improves balance and flexibility
- Meditation and relaxation techniques help to reduce pain
- Walking can improve your mood and help you sleep better
- Stretching the site of an injury strengthens and rebuilds muscle strength and may be ordered by your doctor

Be sure to work with your doctor to create an activity plan that is right for you.

## Get a good night's sleep

Getting a good night of sleep is important to health and healing. Without sleep, you can experience anxiety, irritability, depression and fatigue. Each of these may intensify your feeling of pain. Because side effects of some medicines cause sleeplessness, you may consider the following:

- Avoid napping during the day
- Limit or avoid caffeine such as tea, coffee, soda or energy drinks after lunch
- Avoid or limit how much alcohol you drink, especially right before bed and only if allowed by your doctor
- Exercise as instructed by your doctor or healthcare provider but try to avoid it right before bed
- Avoid watching TV and being on your computer or phone right before sleeping, especially if you are in your bed
- Practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, as you are falling asleep
- Follow a regular routine
  - Go to bed and get up at the same time each day
  - Get up at the same time each day
  - Get out of bed if you don't fall asleep and return once you begin to feel tired.

## Adopt a positive outlook

Try to maintain a positive outlook to help manage, and even decrease, your pain. Focus on things that make you happy. Be kind to yourself. Spend time doing things you enjoy. For example, you can: read, go for a walk, do your favorite hobby or watch a funny movie. This can also help you maintain strong relationships and a good support system.



## Resources

To learn more about managing your pain, helpful resources include:

- The American Chronic Pain Association **[theacpa.org](http://theacpa.org)**
- The ACPA facilitates peer support and education for individuals with chronic pain. Find tools for pain management, your medical condition, and tips to understand what is happening in your body.
- MedLinePlus **[medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov)**
- Read articles, about health, medications, and supplements, as well as videos and tools for download.
- The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine **<https://nccih.nih.gov>**
- Learn about research results, education, and tools for the health products and practices that support alternative health.
- CDC **[cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)**
- **[helioscomp.com](http://helioscomp.com)**



### **About Optum for Workers' Compensation**

The workers' comp division of Optum collaborates with our clients to deliver value beyond transactional savings while helping ensure injured workers receive safe and effective clinical care. Our innovative and comprehensive medical cost management programs include pharmacy, ancillary and managed care services from first report of injury to settlement.

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