

Recommendations Regarding Pain Flare-Ups

Pain is a highly subjective experience; it cannot be measured and is experienced differently by each individual. People with chronically painful conditions (i.e. pain lasting longer than six months) frequently have flare-ups. In other words, the pain becomes more intense (hurts more) without a change in the location or character of the pain. These flare-ups can sometimes be caused by an event (auto accident, fall, emotional stress) and can sometimes happen without any reason. Although painful, they do not mean that something is wrong. While this is true for new pain (pain which you have never experienced before), it is not true for chronic pain. In chronically painful conditions there is no longer any ongoing inflammation or tissue damage to your body. Except for the increased amount of pain, the flare-up can safely be ignored. Pain flare-ups are not an emergency. **They usually subside in 2-3 weeks with no treatment.** We know that when your pain flares-up it can leave you feeling out of control and frightened. You begin to feel helpless, thinking the pain will always be this intense. You don't know what to do so you call the doctor for help. Be aware that we want to help you, but we cannot rescue you. That is the reason for these handouts. If we give you pain medication or increase your medication with every flare-up, it reinforces the feeling of helplessness and can lead to medications spiraling out of control.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN A FLARE-UP OCCURS?

First, learn to prevent flare-ups. Those of you who fall frequently should consider water aerobics to condition weak muscles. Daily walking, controlled diet, and sleeping at regular times also helps. Practicing daily stress management techniques can also be invaluable. These include guided imagery exercises and deep muscle relaxation techniques.

ONCE A FLARE-UP OCCURS

» If your pain worsens for longer than expected and you start feeling helpless and thinking negatively about it, you are experiencing a flare-up

» Although your pain has increased, it does not mean that there is a new medical problem

» It is normal for people with chronically painful conditions to have occasional pain flare-ups that last up to 3 weeks and it does not mean that there is something wrong as flare-ups can happen for no reason at all

» If your pain is worse, decrease your activities for a day or two. Resting for more than 1-2 days usually does more harm than good; so keep moving and stay active even if that means decreasing some of your most strenuous activities for a while

» If the pain still feels out of control beyond 72 hours and you want to be evaluated, make an appointment to be seen. This will be done at the very next available time which, unfortunately, might not be for several days and remember, pain flare-ups are not medical emergencies

» The doctor or NP will evaluate your symptoms, order any necessary tests or procedures. However, without a change in your pathology, in most cases we will not treat your flare-ups with increased narcotic medication

» Pain medication must be prescribed **at an office appointment** and cannot be refilled due to a missed appointment or overuse. If you choose to take more of the narcotic medication you are already on for your flare-up, **you will not be given an early refill and this can result in alteration or cancelation of your medication**

» We cannot prescribe new, alter existing or refill medication over the phone for any reason without an official visit. This is generally unsafe and, in some instances, unlawful

» If you go to an emergency room during a flare-up, the ER physician should contact our office and we will instruct the ER physician not to issue any medication unless something has changed in your condition

» Postpone any particularly demanding activities that have been planned (such as a long day of shopping, etc.) and work on your pain flare-up instead

» Your body is designed for movement so the sooner you return to normal activity, the better you will feel. The people who do the best are those who remain active and get on with their lives in spite of the pain

» Relaxation techniques, heat, and/ or ice, and guided imagery during a flare-up help the most; not more medications