

## **Pain Management FAQs**

### **Why are doctors who specialize in pain management often anesthesiologists? I thought anesthesiologists were only needed in surgical situations.**

Anesthesiologists' responsibilities during surgery are focused on safely maintaining the vital functions of the body and relieving pain. Many of the techniques they use to make surgery painless can be expanded to relieve other types of pain. Today's anesthesiologists, after completing an undergraduate college program and four years of medical school, go on to study pain management during their four years of anesthesiology residency. Many anesthesiologists receive further postgraduate education to become pain management specialists.

Frequently, the anesthesiologist who specializes in pain management heads a team of medical professionals. The group may include other physicians, nurses and therapists. With their combined expertise, they work together to tailor a plan for the most effective treatment of a particular pain problem.

### **What is the difference between acute pain and chronic pain?**

Acute pain is pain of a short, limited duration, usually the result of an injury, surgery or medical illness. Acute pain often goes away with the healing process.

Chronic pain continues for longer periods of time, sometimes even despite the healing of the original injury. Treatments for acute and chronic pain are often quite different.

### **Can pain management physicians find the cause of my pain?**

Pain specialists are not only experts at treating pain but also at helping to diagnose the source of pain. They will conduct a physical examination and review your medical records in addition to analyzing the description of your pain. Sometimes supplemental diagnostic studies are helpful, such as detailed questionnaires, special X-rays, skin temperature monitoring and local anesthetic tests to pinpoint your pain.

### **What are some treatments for my pain?**

Due to the rapid advances of modern medicine, there are now many varied treatments available for pain. The degree of pain varies from person to person, so your treatment plan will be tailored to your specific needs and circumstances. Treatment may include a single approach or a combination of medications, therapies and procedures, such as:

#### **Medications**

##### **Pain killers**

Narcotic pain killers are often used to treat acute pain or cancer pain. They seldom are prescribed for chronic pain.

##### **Anti-inflammatory drugs**

Aspirin-like drugs are the most commonly used medications of this type. They not only reduce swelling and irritation but also can relieve pain.

##### **Anti-depressants**

Originally used only to treat depression, studies have shown that these

medications can alleviate pain in certain situations. Furthermore, they may have the added benefit of helping the patient to sleep at night.

### **Anti-seizure medicines**

These medicines may help relieve certain types of pain by reducing abnormal electrical discharges in damaged nerves.

### **Other medicines**

Your physician may prescribe other types of medicine that are more specific to the type of pain you are experiencing.

## **Injection Treatments**

Local anesthetics, with or without cortisone-like medicines, can be injected around nerves or into joints. These may act to reduce swelling, irritation, muscle spasms or abnormal nerve transmissions that can cause pain.

## **Electrical Stimulation**

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) is the most common form of electrical stimulation. It is not painful and does not require needles. TENS consists of a small, battery-operated device that can stimulate nerve fibers through the skin to diminish pain. Also, electrical stimulation of acupuncture points is sometimes performed.

## **Physical Therapy**

Exercise, whirlpool, ultrasound, massage and manipulation are some of the treatments that a physical therapist may provide for you.

## **Relaxation**

Training in biofeedback or other forms of relaxation therapy are often used to relieve pain, reduce muscle spasm and diminish stress.

## **Surgery**

When necessary, surgical treatment may be recommended.

## **Are there psychological effects of chronic pain?**

Yes, chronic pain may produce feelings of anger, sadness, hopelessness and even despair. In addition, it can alter one's personality, disrupt sleep, interfere with work and relationships and even have a profound effect on other family members.

However, there is help. A comprehensive pain treatment program, including psychological support, may be what is needed to manage chronic pain.

## **What types of pain problems can be addressed by pain management?**

Problems commonly treated in pain management centers include low back pain, cancer pain, shingles, sympathetic dystrophy, nerve problems, headaches and arthritis.

## **Are there different types of pain treatment facilities?**

Some so-called "pain clinics" offer only one type of treatment, such as acupuncture or manipulation, and others treat only a special type of complaint, such as headaches or back pain. Comprehensive pain management centers, on the other hand, are usually

directed by a physician (often an anesthesiologist) who specializes in pain treatment with a staff of other physicians, nurses, therapists and medical professionals who are experts in the management of painful disorders. Newport Pain Management is one of these centers.

**Is a pain management specialist appropriate for me?**

Many painful conditions can be successfully treated by your local family physician. If your pain persists and does not improve with treatment, discuss with your physician whether a referral to **Newport Pain Management** for comprehensive pain treatments is appropriate for you.

**Adapted from the American Society of Anesthesiologists**