



How to Manage Pain

This guide will help you understand:

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This guide is written for people living with kidney disease and those who help care for them. It does not replace advice from your healthcare team (for example, your nephrologist, nurses, social worker, dietitian, pharmacist, and family doctor).

What is Pain?

Pain is feeling hurt or uncomfortable anywhere in the body.

- You may feel it all of the time or only some of the time
- Pain is a common symptom experienced by people living with kidney disease
- Everyone feels pain differently. Only you know how much pain you feel and how it affects you – you are the best judge
 - Your healthcare team may ask you to describe your pain on a scale from 0 to 10 – with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst possible pain
 - Your healthcare team may ask you to describe your pain as burning, shooting, piercing, stabbing, electricity, throbbing, or sharp

What Causes Pain?

Understanding the cause of your pain will help your healthcare team treat it in the best way.

Things that might cause or worsen pain include:

- Some illnesses or diseases
- Medical procedures and tests
- Dialysis treatments (for example, pain from cramping or needing a fistula)
- Other problems, such as constipation and nausea
- Stress and anxiety
- Emotional, social, and spiritual impact of kidney disease



- Exercise Tips
 - Start slowly and go at your own pace
 - If you are not already active, talk to your healthcare team about how to safely start activity
 - There are also many exercises that can be done while seated
 - If you are already active, talk to your healthcare team about your activities and make a plan to keep doing them or change what you are doing

If you need help making a plan to be more active, ask for a referral to a(n):

- Occupational therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Exercise specialist
- Rehabilitation specialist
- Registered massage therapist



What Can I Do To Manage Pain?

Treating your pain may help you sleep and eat better, enjoy time with family and friends, and do your work or hobbies. You can play an active role in your pain management. It often includes a combination of treatments, and you may have to try a few different things before you find the ones that work best for you. It is important to update your healthcare team with any changes to make sure your pain is being managed.

Be Active and Exercise

- Even small, simple exercises may help your pain:
 - Walk to the end of your driveway or up and down your hallway
 - Ride an indoor bike, do gentle yoga and stretching, or swim



Find Support

It is normal to feel upset and frustrated when you are in pain. You can find support in your community and through your healthcare team.



These tips can help you get support:

- Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener (for example, a friend or family member) about how your pain makes you feel
- Talk to your family doctor
- Talk to someone at a place of worship – spiritual or religious advice may help you feel better
- Join a kidney disease support program to share stories with other people. Many hospitals and The Kidney Foundation of Canada offer support programs where you can get in touch with others who can share their experiences.
- Join a chronic pain self-management group
 - These programs have special sessions to teach you how to manage your pain
 - Ask your healthcare team about classes in your community



Pain can have an impact on your mood. If you feel like you may be depressed or anxious, ask your healthcare team to speak to a social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or someone who is an expert in helping people living with kidney disease cope.

Get Physical Relief

Ask your healthcare team about other treatments before you use them, for example:

- Rubs like diclofenac (for example, Voltaren Emulgel)
- Using heat and/or ice on the body to relieve pain
 - Heat and ice may not be safe if you have numbness from nerve damage – check with your healthcare team

Relaxing Activities and Managing Your Stress May Help to Control Your Pain

These activities may help you relax:

- Breathing exercises
- Distraction activities, for example, watching TV or playing computer games
- Healthy coping activities, for example, walking outside, gardening, enjoying nature, reading, listening to music, or visiting with family and friends



Some people find other therapies help them take control of their pain. Be aware that sometimes how well they work and how safe they are has not been proven. They may also cost a lot of money. Speak to your healthcare team if you have questions about other therapies that you may be interested in.

