

Identifying Pain Points for Pain Management



For many, managing pain is a daily struggle. While some people find they can easily manage their pain, other find it to be more complex. The most important element to all pain management is identifying the cause of pain. Once a patient understands where the pain is coming from and what it means, treatment can be planned accordingly.

SOURCES OF PAIN

Sources of pain can be divided into two categories:

1. *Nociceptive pain*: The body's nervous system is working as it should. There is a source of pain (i.e. cut, broken bone, pinched nerve, etc.) and that information is passed to the brain. The brain receives the information and a person then becomes aware that they have pain.

2. *Neuropathic pain*: The body's nervous system is not working properly. The brain believes there is an injury somewhere but there is no obvious source of pain. This type of pain can also be divided into two groups.

Radicular pain: This pain stems from irrita-

tion of the nerve roots (i.e., pinched nerve or disc herniation). A person could feel pain, weakness, tingling or numbness down the limb in which the nerve runs.

• *Somatic pain*: This pain is solely located in the back or thighs.

Some examples of neuropathic pain includes complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), fibromyalgia, interstitial cystitis, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

OTHER CAUSES OF PAIN

There are other causes of pain. Understanding the symptoms of each may help a patient determine what type of treatment is needed.

Headaches: The most common cause of pain. When a patient gets a headache they should note if they have taken any medication, had any surgical procedures done recently, received any injury to the head, and other factors like the time of day and the last thing eaten. This can help determine the severity of the headaches and whether serious medical attention is necessary.

Facial pain: This is often a side effect of injections into local nerves. Intense pain shooting into the face may also be identified as trigeminal neuralgia.

Peripheral nerve pain: This is a disorder of one or multiple nerves apart from the brain and spinal cord. Patients may feel tingling, numbness, unusual sensations, weakness or burning pain.

Coccydynia: This refers to pain on the tailbone, or coccyx. It is a result from trauma but can also occur without any apparent cause as the pain originates in the portion of the nervous system that we have no control of (involuntary or autonomic nervous system).

Compression fractures: Just like any break of the bone, compression fractures hurt. They appear often in the elderly who suffer from osteoporosis or loss of calcium.

Myofasciitis: This pain occurs in the muscles and can be treated through massage, exercise or physical therapy.

Torticollis: This refers to a spasm in the neck muscles. If a patient feels like they must hold their neck tilted to one side, this is the specific pain they are feeling.

Piriformis syndrome: A person's piriformis muscle runs from the hip to the tailbone and the sciatic nerve passes through it. If a patient's piriformis muscle begins to spasm, the sciatic nerve will be squeezed causing pain to shoot down the leg.

Plantar fasciitis: Pain in the heel.

Lateral epicondylitis: Also known as tennis elbow.

Cancer pain: Pain may arise from cancer itself, compression of a nerve or body part, fractures, or treatment of the cancer.

TREATING PAIN

Once a patient and physician determine where the pain is coming from and what type of pain it is, treatment options may be discussed. Non-medical treatment may include rest, stretching, exercise, heat/ice, physical therapy and massage. Patients may be advised to change their diet, lose weight, or change other behaviors that may be causing pain.

Medical treatments typically include pain medication (analgesics) which fall into three basic drug categories: Non-opioid drugs, opioid drugs and drugs that are used to complement other analgesics. Patients may be prescribed aspirin, acetaminophen, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to treat pain. Other drugs include codeine, hydrocodone, methadone and more.

Whatever your pain is, be sure to pay attention to how it feels, how long it lasts, and never be afraid to seek medical attention. ■

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