

Treating Your Pain Without Opioids

Treating your pain

The goal for pain management is to reduce your pain so that you can live your life as normally as possible. Opioids are one option for treating your pain out of many other options. When choosing how best to treat your pain, your healthcare team will talk about the potential benefits and risks of both opioid and non-opioid treatment options.

Your healthcare team may recommend that you try treating your pain with medicines other than opioids, or with a mix of different treatments.

Treatment may be different from person to person

People can respond differently to treatment and pain medicines. Sometimes pain can be hard to treat, especially if you have had it for a long time (chronic pain). You may need a few types of medicines and/or other therapies to reduce your pain. Combining different therapies with opioid medicines may work better for your pain. This might help you use a lower dose of opioids for your pain or can shorten the amount of time you need to be on opioids.

Examples of non-opioid treatment choices

On page 2 is a chart showing some of the common non-opioid pain medicines your doctor might recommend. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are taking any medicines that don't require a prescription. In this chart, you will find what type of pain they treat best and other things you should know about these medicines. It is important to remember to read the instructions and ingredients in each of these medicines carefully because taking too much can hurt your body.

On page 3 is a chart showing some treatment options your doctor might recommend in addition to or instead of pain medications. These treatments have been shown to help many people reduce their chronic pain.



Talk with your doctor

It is important for you and your healthcare team to work together to make sure your pain is managed in the best way. Your care team can help you keep track of your pain levels, see how your pain responds to treatment, and follow up with you to make sure you are taking your medicine correctly.

Examples of Non-Opioid Treatment Choices:

Medicine	Used to Treat	What You Need to Know
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Weak to average pain, cuts, muscle or bone injuries, osteoarthritis, low back pain, migraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not require a prescription • May not treat pain as well as NSAIDs (does not treat inflammation) • Fewer side effects than NSAIDs • Use with caution if you have liver disease or drink alcohol heavily • Taking more than the recommended dose can damage your liver
Aspirin (Bayer, Bufferin)	Weak to average pain, fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not require a prescription • Can increase risk of stomach bleeding • Lowers risk of stroke and heart attack when taken regularly at low doses • Less effective for pain relief than NSAIDs • Will lower fever • Use with caution if you have a blood clotting disorder, take blood thinners, or are allergic to aspirin
NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) (Ibuprofen, Advil, Aleve)	Osteoarthritis, low back pain without sciatica, pain after surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not need a prescription • Treats inflammation • Use with caution if you have kidney disease, a history of stomach ulcers, gout or bleeding disorders • Can cause stomach upset, bleeding or kidney damage if taken without food, in large amounts, or for a long time
Cox-2 Inhibitors (Celebrex)	Osteoarthritis, low back pain without sciatica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need a prescription • Less likely than NSAIDs to cause ulcers or bleeding in the digestive tract • Side effects include headache and dizziness, kidney problems, fluid retention and high blood pressure • Talk with your healthcare team if you have heart disease or risk factors for heart disease
Other medicines (pregabalin, duloxetine, gabapentin, tricyclic antidepressants)	Nerve pain, pain complicated by depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need a prescription • Side effects include sleepiness, dizziness and constipation
Topical creams or ointments (lidocaine or capsaicin)	Nerve pain, osteoarthritis, musculoskeletal pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need a prescription • You might have skin irritation

Other Treatment Options

Treatment	What You Need to Know
Joint injections (steroid shot) or removal of fluid from a painful joint (arthrocentesis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steroids can help lower inflammation and take away pain around nerves, spine or joints like your shoulder, knee, hip or fingers. These therapies are used to treat arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, rotator cuff disease, and nerve-related pain (radiculopathy) • They can improve short-term pain and function, but these benefits may not last, so you may need many injections • The risks are more joint damage or swelling, loss of cartilage (thin covering of the joint), or loosening of the ligaments around the joint • Rarely, serious events can happen, including loss of vision, stroke, paralysis, and death
Exercise therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to treat muscle or bone pain, low back pain, fibromyalgia symptoms, hip and knee osteoarthritis pain, and to help prevent migraines
Physical therapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps improve your ability to do activities of daily living like walking, standing, driving, dressing, bathing, and eating • You may need multiple visits and to do exercises at home
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help you learn how to identify and cope with other emotions and behaviors related to pain, like fear, avoidance, distress, and anxiety
Mind-body techniques like meditation, yoga, breathing exercises and tai chi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many public classes and videos that can help teach you these techniques
Massage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help loosen tight muscles and relieve pain
Acupuncture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be covered for chronic pain, migraines, or nausea and vomiting after surgery
Chiropractic care (correcting when a person's spine may be crooked)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This helps low back and neck pain, headaches and fibromyalgia
Psychotherapy (talk therapy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can give emotional support, teach strategies to live better with chronic pain, and stress-reduction techniques

What else you need to know:

These may or may not be covered by your insurance. If you are interested in any of these other techniques, here are some tips about next steps:

- Ask your doctor for a recommendation and a referral
- Call your insurance company to see if they will help pay for it
- Call the [MaineHealth Learning Resource Center](#) to ask about information for pain management: 866-609-5183

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