

Painful Wounds

Why do wounds cause pain?

A wound can cause pain for many reasons. A wound that is infected, inflamed or swollen may cause pain. The open tissue in a wound may be tender and painful. Dressing changes may be painful if the dressing sticks to the wound. In people with diabetes, nerve damage may cause or worsen pain in the legs and feet. If your wound makes you walk with poor balance, you may develop painful sprains or joint aches. Blocked arteries in the legs can cause pain because of poor blood flow in the legs. This pain is often worse when walking or when the legs are elevated.

How will my pain be treated?

Many treatments used for your wound can also help reduce pain.

Antibiotics and surgery often lessen pain by treating infection. After surgery, some people may feel either more or the same amount of pain as before. But many people have less pain once the infected tissue is removed.

Moist dressings (bandages with a cream, gel or liquid) can stop the dressing from sticking to your wound. This will lessen the pain you feel with dressing changes. You can also pour sterile saline on the dressing and let it soak for a few minutes before you take it off. This helps the dressing to come off more easily.

Physical therapy and **custom shoes** can improve your walking and reduce aches and pains.

Opening blocked arteries can help pain from poor blood flow.

Remember, as your wound gets smaller and heals, there will be less exposed, tender tissue to cause pain.

What kinds of medications are used to treat pain?

There are many kinds of medications that can lessen many types of pain. A person who has constant pain needs to take pain medications regularly. People who have pain only once in a while should take pain medication only when they need it. It is best to take the medication at the time you feel the pain begin. The medication will work better if you take it early, rather than waiting until the pain is bad.

Here are some medications used to control pain:

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is a good pain medication for many people. Acetaminophen does not cause problems with your stomach or kidneys.

Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and similar medications such as diclofenac (Voltaren®), naproxen (Naprosyn®), and ketorolac (Toradol®) lessen both pain and inflammation. These medications can irritate the stomach and cause kidney problems, especially in people who already have kidney disease. They can also

worsen high blood pressure or heart disease, and they can make you more likely to bleed. They should not be used if you are pregnant. If you have health problems, it is best to talk to your doctor before you take these medications.

Lidocaine (Lidoderm®, Lidopain®) cream and patches lessen pain by numbing the area where they are placed.

Narcotic (opiate) **medications** can help if your pain is severe and does not improve with acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or topical medications. Narcotics come in many forms, including patches and pills.

These medicines are safe and are not likely to lead to addiction when they are used to treat pain. When used for a long period of time, you may become dependent and tolerant to the medicine. This is not the same as addiction. If you have or had a problem with alcohol and/or chemical dependency (taking street drugs or using prescription medicines to ‘get high’), tell us so that we can work with you to provide the best pain relief possible.

Do pain medicines have side effects?

Yes. All medicines can cause side effects. Most people will not have a problem with this. Some of the more common side effects of pain medicines are upset stomach, nausea, constipation, itching, and drowsiness. We will discuss the side effects of the medications you are given. Tell us if you have any side effects from your pain medication. We can adjust your medications to improve or stop the problem.

What happens if I have chronic pain?

There are some patients who have chronic (long-lasting) pain. Patients with chronic pain may be referred to a neurologist or to a pain specialist, to help control the pain.

What do I do if I have questions?

Every person who has lived with pain knows it can affect your ability to accomplish tasks, enjoy life, deal with stress, and relate well to the people around you. It is important for you to understand the options for treating pain and to discuss them with your doctor. If you have a question about your pain and/or pain medications, please talk with your doctor.

What do I do if I have a question?

If you are confused or have a question about your pain, please call us at 212.932.4325, at any time. You can also find information at our website: www.ColumbiaWoundHealing.org.

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied on for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.