Overview

Pain is a complicated combination of emotional, chemical and physical components. Treating and managing pain often requires several approaches.

Treatment

- Over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen sodium
- Prescription medications including narcotic analgesics (opioids or opiates), narcotic-like medications, antidepressants, prescription-strength NSAIDS, combination drugs and topical pain-relief agents
- Physical or rehabilitative therapy
- Lifestyle changes and behavioral interventions such as exercising and quitting smoking
- Coping skills
- Surgery
- Psychological counseling
- Ice
- Alternative approaches including acupuncture, acupressure, biofeedback, chiropractic, craniosacral therapy, electrical stimulation (also known as TENS), homeopathy, hydrotherapy, hypnosis, massage, meditation, osteopathic medicine, reflexology and supplements
- Lifestyle changes including exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet

Facts to Know

Pain is the body's way of sending a warning to the brain that something is wrong. Both emotions and chemicals alter the amount of endorphins, the body's natural pain relievers, which block the relay of pain messages to the brain.

Women are more likely than men to suffer from certain conditions that cause neuropathic pain, including migraine headaches, osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis.

Using narcotics for pain relief, under the supervision of a medical professional, will usually not lead to addiction.

Aspirin and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) work to relieve pain but can cause stomach irritation. As with other pain medications, your body adjusts to NSAIDs, so you may have to take increasingly higher doses to get the same effects. NSAIDs are not effective after a maximum dose is reached.

Pain clinics specialize in the prevention, evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of painful disorders. Consider visiting a pain clinic if pain does not go away after medical treatment within the timeframe provided by your practitioner. Persistent pain can alter your ability to function, which, without intervention, may lead to depression.

Chronic pain affects about 100 million American adults, costing the nation up to $635 billion annually in medical treatments and lost productivity.