



SENIORCARE OPTIONS

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**Candor. Compassion.
Competence.**

Aging Life Care Management
for the Metro Atlanta Area
Assisting medically frail seniors,
disabled adults, & their caregivers



Older Adults & Pain – The importance of proper assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and control

Pain is medically defined as an unpleasant feeling or sensation conveyed to the brain that signals actual or potential injury to the body. It's a subjective interpretation of discomfort that can vary in intensity, duration, cause, location, pattern, and relieving factors. As we age, there are a variety of explanations for why someone might experience pain – however, against popular belief, pain is not a normal result of aging.

Research shows that a high number of aging adults do experience pain - about 50% of all older adults living in the community and 85% of those in nursing homes have persistent pain. About 80% of older adults overall have chronic medical conditions associated with presenting pain.

There may be persistent physical pain due to dental problems, contractures, arthritis, decubitus ulcers, osteoporosis, or degenerative joint disease. There can be acute pain due to injury, surgery, or a heart attack. There may be neuropathic pain (caused by damage to the nervous system) from diabetes, previous stroke, or chemotherapy treatments. Many people have both chronic and acute issues – producing multiple types and sources of pain.

Uncontrolled pain may have negative effects on sleep, impair immune functioning, reduce socialization, increase need for care and healthcare costs, increase cognitive issues, and increase likelihood of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Thus, effective management of pain is key – however, much information is needed about the person and their pain to know how to best assist with the symptoms.

A person can often tell you they are in pain – as in “My neck is hurting.” Or, “I have a burning feeling in my feet and legs.” The gold standard for pain assessment by the medical community remains a person's ability to tell the provider about their pain.

However, it can also be important to look for and discuss other ways that pain can be communicated. It can present in facial expressions – such as grimacing, frowning, or clenched teeth. It can present through non-word verbalizations such as moaning, crying, yelling, screaming, and swearing – or, the person may become unusually quiet. There may be mood changes or behaviors – such as becoming aggressive, less patient, or more withdrawn. Someone might hold or move their body differently – such as guard a knee that hurts, become rigid with attempts to walk, or hold their arm closer to the body.

Once pain is observed or disclosed, it is necessary to discuss an individualized, person-centered, pro-active plan for pain management.

It will be important to know what has previously been effective for their pain, what medications they are currently taking (including

prescribed, over the counter, and herbal), their current alcohol consumption, and the current functioning of their liver, kidneys, and gastrointestinal system through recent lab work (as this will effect what medications may be most helpful or potentially harmful).

Simple comfort measures, massage, acupuncture, warm/cold applications, music therapy, and a variety of relaxation techniques can help to reduce pain. Regular physical activity has also been shown to reduce pain (even if one has to force through their pain at first) – and it is proven to also enhance overall mood and functioning. The non-medication based techniques can be very successful must be individually tailored to one's preference, abilities, and personal effectiveness.

If ineffective, medications may also be helpful under the careful assessment, discussion, and guidance from one's physician. It is important to request the lowest effective dose, be aware of and monitor for side effects, know a drug's overall effects on multiple systems, ask regarding potential drug interactions, and request guidance on how to maintain a proper bowel regimen.

Resource Available

American Chronic Pain Association –

<http://theacpa.org/Communication-Tools> - Aids with good communication with providers regarding one's pain – which can help identify patterns, effectiveness of medications/treatments, and more successful control overall.

Support Group Information

Lacy Doremus, LMSW, C-ASWCM, facilitates a monthly caregiver support group at 7pm at Presbyterian Village - conference room between Hearthstone and Wellness center. The address is 2000 E West Connector Austell, GA and meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at 7pm.

About SeniorCare Options

SeniorCare Options provides Certified Aging Life Care Management throughout the Metro-Atlanta area. Our team consists of Master's level clinicians in the fields of counseling, social work, therapeutic recreation, and registered nursing. Our backgrounds are vast and specific to the current clinical needs of our clients and their families who may be in transition, have chronic or difficult-to-manage conditions, and who require increased guidance. Our interdisciplinary focus, extensive experience, and heightened sensitivity to their specific needs prove to be an invaluable asset to families faced with the maze of options and care needs. **For more information** regarding Aging Life Care Management services, our support groups, or to inquire about requesting services for someone under your care, **please contact us at: 770-579-9177 or brandih@seniorcareopt.com.**