Pain Management
What all nursing home residents and families need to know

What is Pain?
Pain is a sign of some physical hurt or disorder. Pain is the way your body tells you that something is wrong, but you can be in pain even when no actual harm is being done to your body.

People experience pain differently. The amount of pain a person has depends on the type of pain it is, where it is located, and how sensitive the person is to pain. A person with a lower tolerance of pain feels it faster or more intensely than someone else who has a higher tolerance for pain. Feeling scared or anxious can make the pain feel worse.

If you are in pain, it is up to you to judge how much pain you are in. Your doctor and nurse can help you choose a way to manage pain that is right for you.

Non-drug Pain Relief
There are several ways to manage your pain without taking medicine. These can be used alone, or together at the same time:

- meditation
- imagery
- relaxation techniques
- music
- nerve stimulation
- humor
- heat or cold
- distraction
- aroma therapy
- exercises
- therapeutic activities
- massage

Medications for Pain
Different types of medicine control pain. They range from over-the-counter aspirin to prescribed narcotics.

Medical studies show that it is better to take pain medicine before pain gets too severe. Otherwise, you may have to take more pain medicine to relieve it later. In fact, when you take pain medicine on an around-the-clock schedule, you use less of it. This will help you better control your pain.

Concerns about Pain Medication
Addiction
When you take pain medicine to control pain, it doesn’t mean you are addicted. It is unlikely that someone in pain will become addicted to pain medicine no matter how much or how often they take it. Addiction is psychological as well as physical.

Physical Dependence
Physical dependence is not addiction. Dependence can occur when you take narcotics over a long period of time. If you no longer need pain medicine, your doctor will slowly decrease the amount over a few days to help your body adjust.

Tolerance
Tolerance means your body may need more pain medicine to control your pain. Tolerance may occur when you take pain medicine over a long period of time. This is normal and can be managed by your doctor and nurse.
What about Side Effects?

Pain medicine can cause side effects that happen when you first start taking pain medicine, and usually wear off after a short period of time. It is important to be aware of the side effects, so that you can report them to your nurse or doctor. Information about common side effects is provided below.

Constipation
This common side effect occurs because pain medicine can slow down the function of your intestines. Constipation can be prevented by drinking adequate fluids, eating foods high in fiber like grains, fruits and vegetables, staying physically active, and taking stool softeners or laxatives as directed by your physician.

Drowsiness
Narcotics cause this side effect. It usually disappears in a few days, when your body has adjusted to the pain medicine.

Nausea
Several things can cause this side effect, including pain medicine, pain itself, anxiety, other medications, or constipation. You can help control nausea by:

- Eating small amounts often and slowly
- Avoiding fatty or fried foods
- Using a straw to drink
- Resting after meals

Dry Mouth
Dry mouth is another side effect of pain medicine. Rinsing your mouth and drinking plenty of fluids will make your dry mouth feel better.

Describe Your Pain

There are two categories of pain:

1. Acute pain usually has a definite onset and does not last a long time. It usually feels better as the injury heals.

2. Chronic pain lasts for longer periods of time, such as arthritis, back pain, or cancer pain.

It is very important to tell your doctor or nurse everything you can about your pain so they can help you relieve it. When you are asked to describe your pain consider the following questions.

- When did the pain begin?
- What does the pain feel like (sharp, dull, throbbing)?
- Where is the pain?
- What type of pain is it (constant or off and on)?
- What makes the pain worse (walking, coughing, moving, etc.)?
- What does the pain prevent you from doing (sleeping, eating, socializing, etc.)?
- What relieves your pain?
- How severe is your pain?