Managing Pain After Surgery
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What is pain?
Pain is an unpleasant feeling.
Pain is a unique feeling that only you can understand. Some people think that pain after surgery is something that you must put up with. This is not true.

It is important that your pain is managed well.

We want to work with you to avoid and help your pain. When you are in the hospital, we will ask you to tell us about your pain using a scale from 0-10.
If 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain ever, what number would you give your pain?

No pain

Worst pain ever

We want to know about your pain at rest and also when you are moving around.
Why is pain control so important?
Less pain means less stress on your body. Your body heals better with less stress.
With less pain, you start walking, doing your breathing exercises, and getting your strength back quicker. This lowers your chance of problems such as infection and blood clots.

What can I do to help keep my pain under control?
Before surgery
Ask your doctor or nurse what to expect. Being ready helps put you in control.
Some questions to ask are:
› Will there be pain after surgery?
› How long is the pain likely to last?
› How will my pain be controlled?

After surgery
When should I ask for pain medicine?
Take your pain medicine when the pain starts. If you know that your pain will get worse when you start walking or during deep breathing and/or coughing exercises, take your pain medicine first.
Pain is harder to control when it gets out of hand. This is a key step in good pain control.
Ask yourself: ‘Does the pain stop me from deep breathing, coughing, and walking around?’ If you answer ‘yes’, then you should let your nurse know.

Tell your nurse or doctor about any pain that will not go away. We want and need to know about pain that does not go away.

How will my pain be controlled?
There are many ways to control pain. Some patients only get pain medicine in the hospital when they ask the nurse. Other patients get pain medicine at set times.

Pain medicines come in different forms. All pain medicines are prescribed by a doctor. Both you and your doctor will decide what form of pain medicine works best for you.

If your pain is mild to moderate and you can take medicine by mouth, we will likely give you pills or liquid pain medicine. Pain pills take about 30-45 minutes to start working.

If your pain is moderate to severe or you cannot take pills, we will likely give you injections or shots.

We may use something called a patient controlled analgesia (PCA) pump. PCA is a tool
that lets you to control your own pain medicine. You will have a button to push that pumps the pain medicine into your intravenous (IV). The pump is programmed to make sure you cannot give yourself more medicine than is safe and right for you.

The anesthesiologist (doctor who puts you to sleep for your surgery) may control your pain by giving you an epidural. This is a small tube inserted in your back. The tube is attached to a pump with a bag of medicine. The pump sends the pain medicine to you around the clock. You will still be able to move around and walk with this kind of epidural.

The doctor that does your surgery may put a small tube near the area where the surgery was done. This tube is called a nerve block. The tube is attached to a pump with a bag of medicine. The pump sends the pain medicine around the clock. The drug freezes (numbs) the area where you had surgery.

You may be followed by the Acute Pain Service. The Acute Pain Service is made up of anesthesiologists and nurses who are specially trained to help people with their pain. If you are followed by the Acute Pain Service team, they will see you once or twice a day.
What are the side effects of the pain medicines?
Some patients notice that they:
› Have an upset stomach or throw up
› Feel sleepy
› Feel itchy
› Have slower breathing
› Have trouble having a bowel movement (pooping)
These side effects can be managed. Let us know if you have any of these side effects.

What else can help control my pain besides pain medicine?
Other medicines that may be used to help with your pain control are acetaminophen (like Tylenol®) and anti-inflammatory medicines.

Things you can do to help with pain control:
› Distract yourself with activities
› Read
› Watch TV
› Change your position in bed
› Talk with family and friends
Remember these key points:
• Pain is harder to manage if it is out of control.
• Help us measure your pain using the 0-10 scale.
• Tell us if you have pain that will not go away or gets worse.

At Nova Scotia Health Authority, you and your family are an important part of the team that manages your pain.