

GeriCare
Introduction to Pain - What is pain?



What is pain?

Ouch, painnnnn! Now that you know what pain sounds like, but do you know what pain is? According to the International Association for the study of pain (IASP), pain is defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with acute or potential tissue damage. It is subjective and is what the patient says it is. So regardless is it “Wa, so painful!” or “Wa, 很痛！” or “Wa, sakit!”, it is still pain as the patient describes it.

Pain is the body's 5th vital sign and is a common yet distressing symptom for patients. 45 to 80% of older adults who experience pain have poor quality of life due to poor sleep, low mood, decreased appetite and may even result in changes in behaviour.

The more common type of pain most of us are familiar with would be physical pain.

The duration of physical pain can be classified into: acute and chronic pain

Acute pain often has a sudden onset, “ouch!”, sorry, and is localized. It usually lasts less than 6 months.

Chronic pain is a prolonged pain of an illness or injury that lasts beyond the usual healing time, usually more than 6 months. Not so much as an “ouch”, but more of an “Ouuuuuuuuch.” Get it?

There are 3 types of physical pain.

First, there is visceral pain that happens in internal organs. It is difficult to describe and to localise this pain. Patients usually experience a sense of tightness and squeezing sensation. Remember the time when you worked so hard, you skipped your meals and you ended up having gastric pain, now that's visceral pain!

Secondly, there is somatic pain that occurs in bones, muscles and skin. Somatic pain is well localised, and is usually described as an aching or sharp pain. Pinch yourself now if you are falling asleep. That's somatic pain. No, I am just kidding. Don't do that.

Thirdly, there is neuropathic pain, which happens when nerves are injured. Common descriptions include "feeling like pins and needles", "shooting pain" and "burning pain".. Sit in the same position and watch this video for another 20 times without moving, you will feel neuropathic pain creeping up your legs.

While physical pain is highly noticeable, there are other aspects, which may contribute to pain.

Psychological pain results from unpleasant emotions experienced by patients and these feelings differ in individuals. They may feel fear, hopelessness or anger (use related voice tone) at delays in diagnosis or treatment failures.

Spiritual pain happens when patients are faced with existential crisis. They begin to question their personhood such as "why is this happening to me?". They may also ask themselves about the purpose of life. Similar to how you feel when its raining heavily outside and you have to get to work instead of sleeping in and you ask: Why me?

Social pain arises when patients have worries about their families, the loss of their jobs and income, or they may feel sad that they lose their roles in the family.

The combination of physical, psychological, spiritual and social elements can result in a "Total Pain" experience for patients.

In summary, pain is a common symptom among palliative care patients. Through timely identification of pain, it allows healthcare workers to assess and treat pain appropriately. For more information on assessment and treatment of pain, check out our next few videos. See you!

References

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