Pain is a multidimensional experience that is best treated using a multimodal approach. Nonpharmacologic interventions are one component of a comprehensive pain treatment plan and most successful when individualized to source of patient discomfort and patient preference for use.

**Nonpharmacologic Pain Interventions**

Benefits of Nonpharmacologic Pain Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heat</th>
<th>Cold</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increases blood supply to an area</td>
<td>Reduces blood circulation to the area of injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxes muscles, reduces muscle spasm, and improves flexibility</td>
<td>Generally recommended up to 72 hours after onset of injury</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduces pain, decreases stiffness, and promotes overall relaxation</td>
<td>Reduces inflammation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested use: chronic musculoskeletal pain, arthritic joints, tension headaches</td>
<td>Produces numbing effect to area of soreness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application: 15 to 20 minutes three to four times daily</td>
<td>Decreases pain and muscle spasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraindications: open wounds, active infection, presence of localized swelling, bruising, or malignant tumor, and patients with decreased sensation</td>
<td>Suggested use: arthritic joints, overuse injury when a muscle or joint is swollen and painful following injury, and surgical pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never use moist heat with a heating cream such as menthol or capsaicin</td>
<td>Application: 15 to 20 minutes three to four times daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruct patient to not lie on a hot pack to avoid falling asleep and potentially burning themselves</td>
<td>Contraindications: do not use over areas of poor circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generally recommended 48 to 72 hours after the onset of injury</td>
<td><strong>IMPORTANT</strong> Discuss use of specific interventions, particularly the physical modalities, with the care team to ensure patient safety.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Considerations for Use of Heat or Cold:**

- Consider patient preference and the convenience of self-treatment after discharge
- Do not apply directly over skin; place a towel or pillowcase between the heat/cold source and the patient’s skin
- Inspect the skin before and after application for signs of irritation
- Heat or cold can be used for any length of time as long as it remains at a comfortable level and does not irritate the skin

**Gentle Massage – back, shoulders, and neck**

- Decreases heart rate, respiratory rate, and lowers blood pressure
- Increases blood circulation to the muscles; reduces muscle tension and spasm
- Improves range of motion
- Promotes relaxation; decreases anxiety
- **Contraindications:** bone fractures, open wounds, burns, deep vein thrombosis, coagulation abnormalities
- Avoid direct massage at a tumor site

**Technique for effective massage:**

- Ask patient about preferences
- Use a warm lubricant such as lotion
- Smooth, long, slow strokes provides relaxation
- Rapid strokes, circular motion and squeezing of tissues stimulates circulation
- Try several degrees of pressure and techniques (kneading, stroking, circling)

**Environmental Control**

- Quiet room, dim lights, and comfortable room temperature promote muscle relaxation
Activity and Exercise

- Beneficial for restoring flexibility, strength, endurance, function, range of motion, and can alleviate discomfort.
- Helps patients regain or maintain independence in ADLs and ambulation
- Regular activity reduces stress, increases energy levels, and improves sleep resulting in improved sense of well-being
- Obtain referral to Physical and Occupational Therapy so that individualized treatments can be provided to reduce pain and increase functional activity

Positioning

- Minimizes stress on joints and increases comfort through appropriate body alignment and support of extremities
- Frequent repositioning minimizes pressure points
- Pillows or towel rolls maintain position and minimize gaps

Splinting

- Splint painful area with a pillow during repositioning, cough and deep breathing

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

- Electrodes applied to the skin carry electrical current to stimulate nerves in the spinal cord to “close the gate” to painful input, which prevents pain signals from traveling to the central nervous system
- Creates a tingling sensation to the affected area
- Contraindicated in patients with pacemakers or in the first weeks of pregnancy
- Do not use on broken or irritated skin, with hot or cold packs, or while patient is asleep
- Requires a provider order. Physical Therapy will set up the TENS unit and determine proper electrode placement.

Aromatherapy

- Essential oils have been shown to relieve pain, nausea, fatigue, and reduce inflammation. Essential oils can also improve mood and sleep.
- Only the essential oils provided by the hospital and approved routes of delivery may be used
- If your department is interested in starting an aromatherapy program, check out the Aromatherapy Toolkit at https://ascension-wi.libguides.com/Aromatherapy

Patient Education

- Patients who are informed about their condition and treatment options are better able to manage their disease and control their pain
- Discuss realistic expectations for pain relief including improved physical and psychosocial function
- Instruct patients on pain control options including medications, nonpharmacologic interventions, and self-management strategies

Guided Imagery / Progressive Relaxation

- Promotes relaxation and decreases anxiety
- Reduces pain by relaxing muscles
- If a laptop or cellphone is available to the patient, search “guided imagery” on YouTube for a variety short videos
- Consider Recreational or Occupational Therapy consults where available

Humor / Laughter

- Helps with deep breathing and increases oxygen exchange
- Lowers blood pressure
- Stimulates skeletal muscles and reduces muscle tension, which can reduce pain
- Laughter can help the brain produce endorphins
- Acts as a coping mechanism; relieves anxiety and stress
- Anyone can use humor but know your patient. What is humorous to one person may not be to another!

Distraction

- Focuses attention away from pain
- Distraction topics need to be interesting to the patient and consistent with the patient’s energy level and ability to concentrate
- Examples of distraction include watching TV, listening to music, reading a book or magazine, guided imagery, and visiting with family
- Music can increase energy and improve mood; helps produce endorphins
- Consider Therapeutic Recreation or Music Therapy consult, where available, for patients needing more structured distraction

Pet Therapy

- Pet therapy is guided interaction between a patient and a trained animal and their handler
- Releases endorphins to help alleviate pain, reduce stress, and improve psychological well-being
- Helps patient’s recover from physical and emotional disorders
- Check local policy for guidelines and restrictions
- Therapeutic Recreation can assist with 1:1 pet therapy programs and interventions.

Prayer / Spirituality

- Spiritual pain impacts physical pain and vice versa
- Spiritual pain occurs when meaning and purpose are threatened; life as we once knew it is no more
- Acknowledge the patient’s suffering
- Intentional presence; sitting quietly and displaying a sense of calmness
- Active listening demonstrates empathy, provides support and reassurance which decreases anxiety and pain
- Consult Spiritual Services

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