



Overview of Pain & the Older Adult

Education Health Care Professionals

Part 2: Types of Pain and their Impact on an Older Person



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Impact of Pain

Consequences of unresolved pain include:



- Poorer quality of life
- Social isolation
- High risk for depression as a result of mood changes
- Low self-esteem
- Unable to be self-sufficient (loss of independence)
- Decreased function can contribute to immobility and frailty
- High risk for skin problems and/or pressure areas if immobile
- Disturbed sleep and irregular sleep patterns
- Weight loss due to decreased appetite

([King & Fraser, 2013](#); [Cavalieri, 2005](#))



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What Triggers Pain?



The two types of pain that arise from tissue damage are:

1. Nociceptive Pain
2. Neuropathic Pain

Sometimes the pain can be a combination of the two (mixed).

(Arnstein, 2016; Fink, 2000; National Pharmaceutical Council, 2001)



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Nociceptive Pain

Damage or **irritation** of peripheral pain receptors as a result of inflammation, musculoskeletal injury or reduced blood supply.

This pain can arise from:



- a) The lining of body cavities (visceral) such as inflammatory bowel disease or a hiatus hernia. Pain may be described as deep and aching.

OR



- b) Subcutaneous tissue of the skin, muscles or bone (somatic) such as arthritis or a chronic ulcer. Pain may be described as throbbing or aching.

(Arnstein, 2016; Davies, 2016; National Pharmaceutical Council, 2001)



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Neuropathic Pain



Can occur as a result of **direct damage** to free nerve endings located in various body tissues and structures in the body.

- This pain can arise from an injury to either the peripheral or central nervous system. It may:
 - Be described as shooting pain, electric, hot, or burning
 - Persist even after the injury resolves
 - Even be triggered by a simple touch (i.e., pain after shingles disappear)

(May, 2017; Davies, 2016; Fink, 2000; National Pharmaceutical Council, 2001)

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Pain Across Time



“**Acute pain** has been defined as pain of recent onset and probably limited duration. It typically has an identifiable temporal and causal relationship to injury or disease.”

(Gordon et al., 2017, p. 19)

“**Chronic pain** commonly persists beyond the time of healing of an injury and frequently there may not be any clearly identifiable cause.” (Gordon et al., 2017, p. 19)

(Gordon et al., 2017)

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Where is the Pain in the Older Adults?

According to the Canadian Psychological Association, older adults can experience a variety of pain from different areas in the body. The most common pain problems would be from...

- Arthritis
- Back pain
- Leg pain
- After shingles
- Following a stroke
- Cancer
- Post-polio syndrome
- Chronic bronchitis
- Emphysema
- Stomach ulcers
- Fibromyalgia
- Osteoporosis



[\(Canadian Psychological Association, 2017\)](#)

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