

Powerful Patient 16

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Managing Pain

Yvette Colón, Director of the Consumer Pain Information Center of the American Pain Foundation, speaks with Joyce about strategies for managing and living with pain.

1) About Our Guest

Yvette Colón, PhD, ACSW, BCD, is the Director of Education and Support at the American Pain Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland, a nonprofit information, advocacy and support organization serving people affected by pain. She oversees the Pain Information Center and all technology-based projects, including APF's website and PainAid: Online Support Community.



Yvette Colón, Ph.D., ACSW, BCD

Prior to joining the American Pain Foundation, she worked at Cancer Care for seven years as an administrator and bilingual clinical social worker. She was the Program Coordinator of Online Services. In that capacity, she managed the email response system and developed a successful online support group program. She supervised the social services support team and management information system unit and maintained responsibility for Internet program development, including staff training, community education for patients and consultation to professionals and organizations throughout the United States. She has facilitated technology-based support groups since 1993.

2) About Pain

Pain is a message. It can be an important symptom of an underlying physical cause that needs attention urgently – a wound, a broken bone, a tumor, a cancer, or another causative condition. It is important first to take care of any such cause, or at least rule it out. Pain is a sufficient symptom to warrant a medical scan to rule out such causes.

Once you have dealt with the urgent causes, you may sometimes be left with ongoing pain. Surgery may leave you with scar tissue, or a condition like fibromyalgia may provoke ongoing pain that is not easy to resolve. Nonetheless, there are strategies to manage pain.

Why is managing your pain important? *(From the American Pain Foundation)* Persistent pain can interfere with your enjoyment of life. It can make it hard to sleep, work, socialize with friends and family and accomplish everyday tasks. When your ability to function is limited, you may become less productive. You may also find yourself avoiding hobbies and other activities that normally bring you happiness in order to prevent further injury or pain. Ongoing pain can

cause you to lose your appetite, feel weak and depressed. Try not to allow your physical illness or pain to take over your life. Pain is a part of you, but it is not YOU. It is not who you are. Managing your pain is an important step to reclaim your life and ensure it does not control you.

3) Getting Help for Pain

You have a right to explore the reasons for your pain, and get relief. If you do not feel you are getting the hearing you deserve from your doctor, there are steps you can take.

The first step is to communicate clearly and fully with your physician. In the small bit of time you have in the doctor's office, do you feel you have given the doctor enough information to really analyze the problem and find the source? It's not an easy thing to do. One very helpful thing to do is to keep a pain journal, noting where it hurts, when it hurts more or less, and exactly how it feels. Is it a burning sensation? Pins and needles? Stabbing pain? Aching pain? Where is it? On a scale from one to ten, with ten being the worst pain you have ever experienced and zero being no pain, how bad is it? There is nothing absolute about the number you use – the idea is to show over time whether the pain is worse or better. It's the trend that will be most useful to the doctor.

- Finding Care for pain, see <http://www.painfoundation.org/page.asp?file=Library/FindingCare.htm>
- See the Pain Journal on page 8 of the Pain Resource Guide (below) or page 2 of the publication Treatment Options (below)
- Pain Resource Guide: A Guide to Getting the Help You Need, <http://www.painfoundation.org/Publications/PainResourceGuide2007.pdf>
- Treatment Options: A Guide for People Living With Pain <http://www.painfoundation.org/Publications/TreatmentOptions2006.pdf>

4) About the American Pain Foundation

Founded in 1997, the American Pain Foundation is an independent nonprofit 501(c)3 organization serving people with pain through information, advocacy, and support. Its mission is to improve the quality of life of people with pain by raising public awareness, providing practical information, promoting research, and advocating to remove barriers and increase access to effective pain management. See <http://painfoundation.org>

The American Pain Foundation provides a number of online resources, including information about a number of pain conditions, an online support community links to resources in the community, a pain newsletter, and guidelines to follow "If You Are In Crisis."

The Pain Community Newsletter is available online. The Spring 2009 issue includes: Unraveling fibromyalgia, Lyme Disease and chronic pain, music therapy for pain relief, Pain & Sexuality series, Top 10 Tips for coping with arthritis, FAQs about opioids, and much more.

<http://www.painfoundation.org/Publications/PCN09Spring.pdf>