

**Q.** *What is a pain diary and how can it help?*

**A.** A pain diary is similar to a regular diary or journal, except the entries focus on your experiences with pain. You should record when you feel pain, the type of pain you felt (burning, aching, etc.), the location of the pain, what you did to treat it, and whether or not the treatment helped. A pain diary can help your health care provider make a diagnosis and plan your treatment options.

**Q.** *Can I take over-the-counter medications for pain?*

**A.** You should ask your health care provider. Although over-the-counter pain medications are safe and helpful for mild to moderate pain for a few days, severe pain or pain that lasts longer than a few days may require a prescription drug. If you are already taking prescription medications, you want to be sure that it will be safe to take over-the-counter medications along with your prescription drugs.

**Q.** *What over-the-counter medicine is best?*

**A.** ■ Acetaminophen (Tylenol, for example) may be the best choice for mild-to-moderate pain caused by musculoskeletal conditions, such as osteoarthritis or low back pain. But if you take acetaminophen for more than a few days, you should talk to your health care provider.

■ Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen, may have more side effects in older people. NSAIDs may also interact with other medical problems and prescription medications. NSAIDs should be used carefully, especially when they are taken at the highest dose or over a long period of time. It is important to always tell your health care provider about all the over-the-counter medications you use. The newest and safer form of NSAIDs, the COX-2 inhibitors, are not available over-the-counter, so you will need a prescription from your health care provider. COX-2 inhibitors are similar to the traditional NSAIDs, but are more selective in their activity, relieving pain and inflammation while preserving the body's ability to protect the stomach from ulcers and allow platelets (blood clotting elements) to work normally.

**Q.** *Will I become addicted to pain killers?*

**A.** Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) and NSAID drugs (such as aspirin, ibuprofen and the COX-2 inhibitors) are not habit-forming. Opioid pain medicines (such as Vicoden, Percocet, Ultracet, Lortab, and others, including morphine) can cause unpleasant symptoms if stopped suddenly. Addiction to opioid pain medicines is very rare in older adults; the risk has likely been overstated and may keep many doctors and their patients from receiving benefits from opioids when other analgesics have not been effective in relieving pain.

**Q.** *Are there side effects from medicines that relieve pain?*

**A.** Any medicine—whether over-the-counter or prescription—may cause side effects.

■ Acetaminophen is an ingredient in many over-the-counter and prescription