medications. If you take several medications that contain acetaminophen, you may be taking too much. Be sure your health care provider knows all medications you are using.

- When used for a long period of time, traditional NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen and naproxen, can cause indigestion, stomach ulcers, easy bruising, or bleeding. These older drugs and the newer COX-2 inhibitors can cause kidney problems, especially in older patients. Although usually safe, these drugs can worsen high blood pressure or contribute to heart failure in patients who are at risk for these problems. That is why it is important to stay in touch with your health care provider so that he or she can guide and monitor you.

- Opioid medications may cause initial drowsiness and usually cause constipation (which can be prevented and treated), but the body generally adapts to many of their side effects quickly. Although they can be habit forming, these medications may be the best choice for you, since their side effects are less serious than those caused by traditional NSAIDs, or untreated, debilitating pain.

Remember, medicines are intended to help you! If you have any questions or concerns about side effects, talk to your health care provider. If you have any side effects, tell your health care provider. There may be other medicines or treatments that might work better for you.

Q. ***My health care provider suggests that I take antidepressants for my pain. Does this mean the pain is just in my head?***

A. No! Research has shown that some antidepressant medications can help relieve some types of persistent pain. Other medicines known to help certain kinds of pain include anticonvulsant drugs, such as Tegretol (carbamazepine) and Neurontin (gabapentin), and local anesthetics, such as lidocaine. These drugs seem to be most effective against persistent pain associated with nerve injuries and nerve diseases (neuropathic pain). Ask your health care provider to explain the medications you are taking.

Q. ***What can I do besides taking medications?***

A. There are many other treatments for pain. The more you know about your pain, the more you can do to control it. There are patient education programs that can teach you about pain and how to cope with it. Ask your health care provider about programs in your area. Exercise is also extremely important. Ask about appropriate physical therapy, exercise, or fitness programs that can improve your physical strength, range of motion of your joints and limbs, walking stability, and endurance. Other non-drug treatments, such as the use of heat, cold, acupuncture, and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), may help some people. It is important to ask your health care provider about the usefulness of these and other treatments for your specific problem.

Q. ***What if my pain is not relieved?***

A. Don't give up! Ask your health care provider for a referral to a pain management center. Your local hospital may offer patient education programs and support groups for patients and family members. Some persistent pain problems are extremely complex and require a team of specialists to diagnose and manage them. Although you may not get complete relief from all pain, much can be done to control or manage most persistent pain problems. ▶