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# Recognizing Behaviors Indicating the Patient has Pain

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**Always ask about pain. BELIEVE THE PATIENT! Remember pain is whatever the patient says it is, occurring whenever and wherever the patient says it does.**

People have different coping patterns and may not always appear as though they are in pain. They may deny “pain,” but use vague general terms such as “soreness,” “hurting all over,” or “aching.” Patients may display any of the following either at rest or while being moved:

- Facial expressions such as grimacing, frowning, looking sad, and wrinkling the brow, especially those who are less alert.
- Restlessness, fidgeting, moving slowly, pacing, rocking back and forth.
- Moaning, groaning, or crying out.
- Rubbing or protecting a place that hurts.

**Patients may also exhibit:**

- Difficulty concentrating.
- Changes in eating patterns.
- Changes in usual behaviors (for example: a very vocal patient becomes quiet or a very quiet patient becomes very vocal).
- Changes in activity level or resting activity or movement.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Sleeping most of the time; or having difficulty sleeping.
- Using behaviors such as humor, conversation, watching TV, listening to music, and guided imagery to deal with the pain.

**Report any of the above behaviors to the nurse. Also, report if the patient is not able to do the things, or enjoy the activities he/she normally does, because the patient is experiencing pain, discomfort, or soreness.**

**Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at [www.HPNA.org](http://www.HPNA.org).**

### References

Bergen K. Pain Management at the End of Life. In: Ersek M. eds. *Hospice and Palliative Nursing Assistant Core Curriculum*. Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association; 2009:9-20.

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McCaffery M, Pasero C. *Pain: Clinical Manual*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. St. Louis, MO: Mosby; 1999.

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