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**In this article we are going to discuss something most all of us seniors are very familiar with – PAIN. Pain is the most common reason for people (of all ages) going to the doctor in the United States. It is the major symptom in many medical conditions and can significantly interfere with our quality of life.**

**Pain is that unpleasant feeling often caused by a damaging stimuli, such as stubbing a toe, burning a finger, putting alcohol on a cut, or bumping the "funny bone". Medical experts define pain as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage.**

**I have researched several studies on pain that affect seniors 65 years of age and older. Let’s face it, all of us experience some kind of pain from time to time. But, 72% of all seniors reported having a pain or multiple pains in their bodies somewhere on a regular basis. 33% of these pains are chronic (occurring daily for more than 6 months) and 67% of the pains happen on a semi-regular basis (occurring in episodes). The most common place in our bodies where pain occurs is our joints and back.**

**Take a look at this pain location chart. (All percentages in this article are rounded off to the nearest percent)**

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| **Location** | **Semi-Regular Pain** | **Chronic Pain** |
| **Joints (Arms, Legs and Hips)****Back****Arms and Legs (Except Joints)****Neck****Head and Face****Abdomen (Stomach)****Chest** | **45%****30%****17%****12%****6%****5%****3%** | **20%****12%****10%****5%****2%****2%****1%** |

**More women (74%) reported having pain than men (70%). More women than men have chronic pain. The high frequency of chronic persistent limb (outside the joints) and back pain in women accounts for this difference. The other pain locations are fairly equal between men and women.**

**Out of seniors reporting pain, 52% said they only had pain in one place; 31% had pains in two places; 13% had pains in three places; and 4% had pains in four or more places in their body.**

**Next, let’s take a look at pain severity by location: (Listed in order by “intense” pain)**

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| **Location** | **Mild** | **Moderate** | **Intense** | **Severe** |
| **Head****Neck****Back****Limb****Joint****Abdomen****Chest** | **6%****12%****7%****11%****12%****8%****11%** | **32%****39%****44%****48%****50%****50%****66%** | **54%****48%****43%****37%****34%****32%****22%** | **8%****1%****6%****4%****4%****10%****1%** |

**If you have lived long enough to be considered a senior and you are part of the 28% who don’t experience pain regularly – you are very lucky!!**

**A quick summary of causes and treatment options for these pains follows:**

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| **Joint Pain** | **Many different conditions can lead to painful joints, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, bursitis, gout, strains, sprains, and other injuries. Joint pain is extremely common. About one-third of adults have had joint pain within the past 30 days. Knee pain was the most common followed by shoulder and hip pain, but joint pain can affect any part of your body, from your ankles to your shoulders. As you get older, painful joints become increasingly more common.****Treatment options:*** **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory pain medicine such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)**
* **Injections of steroid medications**
* **Physical therapy and/or losing weight**
* **Braces and wraps – icing the joint**
* **Joint replacement**
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**Back Pain**

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**Most people have experienced back pain sometime in their life. Back pain includes lower, middle, and upper back pain. Lower back pain is by far the most common.**

**The lower back is an intricate structure of interconnected and overlapping elements:**

* **Tendons and muscles and other soft tissues.**
* **Highly sensitive nerves and nerve roots that travel from the lower back down into the legs and feet – the sciatica nerve is the largest nerve in the body.**
* **Small and complex joints.**
* **Spinal discs with their gelatinous inner cores.**

**An irritation or problem with any of these structures can cause lower back pain and/or pain that radiates to other parts of the body. Pain from resultant lower back muscle spasms can be severe, and pain from a number of other things (muscles, nerves, joints, discs, etc.) can become chronic.**

**While lower back pain is extremely common, the symptoms and severity of lower back pain vary greatly. A simple lower back muscle strain might be excruciating enough to necessitate an emergency room visit, while a degenerating disc might cause only mild, intermittent discomfort.**

**Identifying the symptoms, along with an accurate diagnosis of the underlying cause of the pain, is the first step in obtaining effective pain relief.**

**Back pain causes include:**

* **Nerve and muscular problems**
* **Degenerative disc disease**
* **Arthritis**
* **Accidents**
* **Muscle strains**
* **A lifetime of bad habits (Bad posture, lack of exercise, getting fat, etc.)**

**Treatment options:**

* **Rest**
* **Heat or ice packs**
* **Pain medication**
* **Exercise**
* **Physical Therapist (Massage)**
* **Chiropractic adjustment**
* **Epidural steroid injection**
* **Surgery**

**Limb Pain (Legs, Feet, Arms, Hands) – Outside the joints**

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|  | **There are numerous causes of arm and leg pain. Leg pain, along with arm pain, can be caused by blood vessel disorders, damage to the central or peripheral nervous system and pain that manifests in a person's arm and leg muscles and the connective tissue that surrounds it. In some cases, arm and leg pain occur simultaneously, which can signal a serious underlying health problem.****Aching, numbness, and/or tingling in the arms and hands may be a sign of an impending Heart Attack. A sudden numbness or weakness of an arm or leg - especially on one side of the body is a symptom of a Stroke.****Hand pain has many causes, including injury and disease. The most common conditions that cause pain are:*** **De Quervain's tendinitis is a condition that causes pain on the thumb side of the wrist. It makes it difficult to grasp or hold objects.**
* **Carpal tunnel syndrome is the most common hand/wrist nerve disorders. It is caused by doing repetitive activities such working on the computer. It causes intense pain in the palm, fingers, and forearm.**
* **A fracture or a break in a bone can cause a great deal of hand pain. Besides the pain, you may experience stiffness, swelling, and loss of movement.**

**Foot pain can be due to a problem in any part of the foot. Bones, ligaments, tendons, muscles, fascia, toenail beds, nerves, blood vessels, or skin can be the source of foot pain. The most common causes of foot pain are:*** **Plantar fasciitis is a band of tough tissue connecting the heel bone to the toes. When this becomes irritated or inflamed, you will experience heel and arch pain.**
* **A stone bruise and/or fracture of the heel bone is the most common cause of heel pain.**
* **Metatarsalgia is pain and inflammation in the ball of the foot caused by doing strenuous activities or bad-fitting shoes.**
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| **Neck Pain** | **Neck pain is a common complaint. Causes include:*** **Poor posture**
* **Muscle strain**
* **Arthritis**
* **Bone abnormalities**
* **Pinched or irritated nerve**
* **Trauma**
* **Degenerative diseases or tumor**

**How is neck pain diagnosed? Using X-rays, MRI, CT Scan, and/or using an Electromyography (EMG).****Treatment of neck pain includes the use of anti-inflammatory medication, pain relievers, muscle relaxers, and/or antidepressants. Sometimes a neck brace is needed.** |

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| **Head Pain** |  |  |

**Nearly everybody has had a headache, and most of us have had many. A minor headache is little more than a nuisance that's relieved by an over-the-counter pain reliever, some food or coffee, or a short rest. But if your headache is severe or unusual, you might worry about having a stroke, a tumor, or a blood clot. Fortunately, such problems are rare. Still, you should know when a headache needs urgent care and how to control the vast majority of headaches that are not threatening to your health.**

**Doctors don’t know what causes most headaches, but they** **do know that the brain tissue and the skull are never responsible since they don't have nerves that register pain. But the blood vessels in the head and neck can signal pain, as can the tissues that surround the brain and some major nerves that originate in the brain. The scalp, sinuses, teeth, and muscles and joints of the neck can also cause head pain.**

**When should we worry about a headache? Some of the warning signs are:**

* **Headaches that first develop in your senior years**
* **A major change in the pattern of your headaches**
* **An unusually severe "worst headache ever"**
* **Pain that increases with movement**
* **Headaches that get steadily worse**
* **Changes in personality or mental function**
* **Headaches that are accompanied by fever, stiff neck, confusion, decreased alertness or memory, or neurological symptoms** **such as blurred vision, slurred speech, weakness, and/or numbness**
* **Headaches that are accompanied by pain and tenderness near the temples**
* **Headaches after a blow to the head**
* **Headaches that prevent normal daily activities**
* **Headaches that come on abruptly, especially if they wake you up**
* **Headaches in patients with cancer or impaired immune systems**

**There are more than 300 types of headaches, but only about 10% of headaches have a known cause. Some of the major headaches include:**

* **Tension headaches**
* **Migraine headaches**
* **Cluster headaches**
* **Medication headaches**
* **Sinus headaches**
* **High blood pressure headaches**
* **Ice cream (brain freeze) headaches – I get this one a lot!**
* **Exercise headaches**
* **Sexual intercourse headaches – I never had a problem with this one!**

**Treatment. Most headaches can be controlled with non-prescription pain relievers. If these don’t work, you need to discuss treatment options with your doctor.**

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| **Abdominal (Stomach) Pain** |  |

**I think everybody (especially us seniors) have at experienced abdominal pain (a stomach ache). Most of the causes are not serious and it gets better in a short time. However, pain can also be a sign of a serious illness. It's important to be able to recognize symptoms that are severe and know when to call or go to the doctor.**

**Whether it's a mild stomach ache, sharp pain, or stomach cramps, abdominal pain can have numerous causes. Some of the more common causes include:**

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| **Indigestion****Menstrual cramps****Gas****Hernia****Endometriosis****Appendicitis** | **Constipation****Food poisoning****Lactose intolerance****Gallstones****Crohn’s disease****Gastroesophageal reflux disease** | **Stomach virus****Heartburn****Ulcers****Kidney stones****Urinary tract infection****Stomach cancer** |

**What symptoms of abdominal pain are cause for concern?**

* **Fever**
* **Inability to keep food down for several days**
* **Inability to pass stool**
* **Painful or unusually frequent urination**
* **The abdomen is tender to the touch**
* **The pain is the result of an injury to the abdomen**
* **The pain lasts for several days**
* **Vomit blood**
* **Have bloody stools**
* **Have difficulty breathing**

**If you have any of these symptoms, go to the doctor. Your physician (or a specialist) will try to determine the cause and subsequent treatment. Here are some of the tools and tests doctors use to do this:**

* **The patient’s health history**
* **A physical examination**
* **Blood tests**
* **Urinalysis**
* **X-rays**
* **Computed tomography**
* **Pelvic ultrasound**
* **Endoscopy**
* **Colonoscopy**

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| **Chest Pain** | **Chest pain is scary! The first thing we think of is – “Am I having a heart attack?” Certainly chest pain is not something to ignore but you should know that it has many possible causes. In fact, as much as a quarter of the U.S. population experiences chest pain that is not related to the heart. Chest pain may also be caused by problems in your lungs, esophagus, muscles, ribs, and/or nerves. Bottom line - if you have unexplained chest pain, the only way to confirm its cause is to have a doctor evaluate you.** |

**You may feel chest pain anywhere from your neck to your upper abdomen. Depending on its cause, chest pain may be: Sharp – Dull – Burning – Aching – Stabbing - A tight, squeezing, or crushing sensation**

**Heart Attacks**

**Heart attacks are the leading cause of death for both men and women. In the United States alone, there are about 1.2 million heart attacks per year, and about half of those are fatal.**

**A heart attack happens when arteries get completely blocked and the heart is deprived of oxygen because blood can't get through the blockage. When the heart is deprived of oxygen, its cells start to die. The chest pain that most people associate with heart attacks is the heart's way of calling out for help when it starts dying.**

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|  | **Many people think heart attacks are more of a problem for men than for women, but in fact more than half of those who die from heart attacks are women. Most heart attacks aren't as dramatically painful as the movies (or Redd Foxx on the TV show Sanford and Son) suggest. The symptoms of a heart attack are varied, and can be mild and take weeks to manifest. Chest pain is the most common sign, but 16 percent of heart attack sufferers don't experience that at all. Women are much less likely**  |

**to have chest pain before a heart attack and more likely to experience symptoms (like fatigue) that could be mistaken for some other ailment.**

**Is your chest pain a heart attack or something else? That dull burning in your chest doesn’t seem to be going away, and it feels like it's getting worse. Is it a heart attack, heartburn, or something else? That’s a vexing question, one that millions of people and their doctors face each year. It’s a problem because chest pain can stem from dozens of conditions besides a heart attack.**

**Doctors use several pieces of information to determine who is, and who isn’t, having a heart attack. Since the most accurate tests that can show damage to the heart muscle takes a while to schedule, conduct, and get the results, the best early methods are an ECG (electrocardiogram) plus the story and description of your chest pain and other symptoms.**

**It is more likely to be a heart attack if you experience any of the following symptoms:**

* **A sensation of pain, or pressure, tightness, squeezing, or burning**
* **The gradual onset of pain over the course of a few minutes**
* **Pain covers an large area including the middle of the chest**
* **Pain that extends to the left arm, neck, jaw, or back**
* **Pain or pressure accompanied by other signs, such as difficulty breathing, a cold sweat, or sudden nausea**
* **Pain or pressure that appears during or after physical exertion or emotional stress or while you are at rest**

**Symptoms that are less likely to be heart attack include:**

* **Sharp or knifelike pain brought on by breathing or coughing**
* **Sudden stabbing pain that lasts only a few seconds**
* **Pain clearly on one side of the chest**
* **Pain confined to one small spot**
* **Pain that lasts for many hours or days without any other symptoms**
* **Pain brought on by pressing on the chest or with body movements**

**Summary**

**Well, we seniors might be lucky to live so long but most of us will be experiencing a lot of pain before we finally drop dead. Speaking of dying, here are the top 10 causes of death for seniors 65 years of age and older:**

**1. Heart Disease**

**This is the number one cause of death among adults over the age of 60. Heart disease includes conditions such as heart failure, heart attack and heart arrhythmia that can cause the heart to beat ineffectively and impair circulation.**

**2. Cancer**

**Cancer is the second leading cause of death among seniors. It includes all cancers but breast cancer, colon cancer, and skin cancer are the most common forms of cancer for seniors. Also, included are the malignant blood and bone marrow diseases that cause leukemia.**

**3. Stroke**

**A stroke (cerebrovascular disease) can be caused by either a clot or blockage that cuts off blood flow to a part of the brain or by hemorrhage. In both cases there is damage or death of brain tissue that can cause paralysis, speech disorders, swallowing problems and immobility. People with diabetes and high blood pressure are at higher risk of stroke.**

**4. Lung disease or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**

**Chronic obstructive lung disease decreases the lungs ability to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen. As the disease progresses the patient has to work harder and harder to breath, often feeling as if they are suffocating. These diseases are often linked to a lifetime of smoking, but can be due to other environmental factors.**

**5. Pneumonia**

**The chances of getting pneumonia for older adults is greater during the winter months of the flu season. At high risk are seniors with chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and respiratory conditions. Flu and pneumonia shots are recommended for all adults over the age of 55 to help prevent this killer.**

**6. Diabetes**

**Type two diabetes is a chronic disease that lowers the immune system and can increase risk of stroke, heart disease and other circulatory problems. Wounds take longer to heal and respiratory infections like pneumonia often are more severe.**

**7. Alzheimer’s**

**This progressive and always deadly disease is characterized by progressive memory loss, personality changes and eventually a complete loss of function and ability. Why some people get Alzheimer’s is unknown, and there is no cure, though there are some medications that can slow its progression slightly.**

**8. Kidney Disease or Nephritis**

**Nephritis is an inflammation of the kidney, and can be chronic or acute. It can result from bacterial infection, or toxic drugs such as mercury: arsenic or alcohol. It can progress to renal failure with decreased urine output and a built up of toxins in the blood. Chronic renal failure may lead to a need for dialysis and eventually death.**

**9. Falls and other accidents**

**Seniors are more at risk of accident due to balance disorders, failing eyesight and slower reflexes. Simple falls can result in fractures that cause immobility, disability and may hasten death. Accidents cannot be planned, but precautions can be made to prevent them.**

**10. Septicemia (Bacteria in the blood)**

**Septicemia refers to the presence of pathogenic bacteria in the blood. This can cause an overwhelming infection and death. Anthrax is just one of many organisms that can cause such a massive infection.**

**Here’s a chart that might show us better how we are going to “kick the bucket”.**

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| **Seniors** |
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**My advice to you is to “Live each day to the fullest. Don’t worry about things that happened 25 years ago, or 5 years ago, or 1 year ago, or 1 day ago. Also, don’t worry about tomorrow because you have no control about what will happen. You might die tonight. Live each day at a time.”**

**So, get out of the house – go for a walk, play golf, travel, see new places, visit family and friends, go to a bar, make new friends and have some fun while you still can.**

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