

Sticks and stones may break bones but aches and pains cause worry and angst! Descriptions of aches and pains often relate to muscles, abdominal/visceral areas, cardiovascular, heads, and skeletal areas of the body. Most of us experience aches and pains. An occasional twinge here or there, particularly as we get older. Sometimes pain occurs quickly and just as quickly goes away, leaving a person with some anxiety. Is the pain serious? Should I see a medical care provider?

The National Institutes of Health report that muscle aches and pains, which involve ligaments, tendons, fascia, and soft tissues that connect muscles to bones are common and often involve more than one muscle. "Muscle pain is most frequently related to tension, overuse, or muscle injury from exercise or physically-demanding work. In these situations, the pain tends to involve specific muscles and starts during or just after the activity. It is usually obvious which activity is causing the pain." <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003178.htm> Muscle pain also can be a sign of conditions affecting the whole body (e.g., influenza) and disorders affecting connective tissues throughout the body such as the auto-immune arthritic disease of lupus.

NIH suggests calling one's health care provider if the following occurs: muscle pain persists beyond 3 days; if there is severe, unexplained pain; signs of infection such as swelling or redness around a muscle; poor circulation in the area where muscles ache; if there is a rash or there has been a tick bite; and if muscle pain is associated with starting or changing doses of a medicine (e.g., statin).

Experiencing pain first thing in the morning is thought to be generally less serious as compared to pain in the evening. Pain that doesn't improve with rest, or with physical therapy, or is worse in certain body positions should be checked as well. **When to call 911:** when there is vomiting, a very stiff neck, a high fever, muscle weakness is such that one cannot move part of the body, difficulty in swallowing, or a shortness of breath.

As for cardiovascular situations, PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center's Cardio Vascular Center lists warning signs of a heart attack at its web site. It is important to note that symptoms may be different for women. "Chest pain; feeling breathless (women may be breathless without any chest pain); flu-like symptoms such as nausea, clamminess or cold sweats; unexplained fatigue, weakness or dizziness; pain in upper back, shoulders, arm, neck or jaw; and feelings of anxiety or doom." <https://www.peacehealth.org/shared-pages/Pages/heart-attack-symptoms.aspx?from=/st-joseph/services/cardiovascular-center/womens-heart-services>

Researchers at Washington State University, using data from the National Center for Health Statistics (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>) determined that 19 percent of American adults are in persistent pain (daily or nearly daily for the past three months). They also estimated that 39 million adults are currently experiencing persistent pain (*Washington State Magazine*, Spring 2015). **What is Chronic Pain?** The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke reports that "While acute pain is a normal sensation triggered in the nervous system to alert you to possible injury and the need to take care of yourself, chronic pain is different. Chronic pain persists. Pain signals keep firing in the nervous system for weeks, months, even years. There may have been an initial mishap -- sprained back, serious infection, or there may be an ongoing cause of pain -- arthritis, cancer, ear infection, but some people suffer chronic pain in the absence of any past injury or evidence of body damage. Many chronic pain conditions affect older adults. Common chronic pain complaints include headache, low back pain, cancer pain, arthritis pain, neurogenic pain (pain resulting from damage to the peripheral nerves or to the central nervous system itself), psychogenic pain (pain not due to past disease or injury or any visible sign of damage inside or outside the nervous system). A person may have two or more co-existing chronic pain conditions." http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/chronic_pain/chronic_pain.htm

The Institute of Medicine issued a blueprint in 2011 for relieving pain in American citizens. The blueprint includes excellent information about transforming the prevention, care, education and research about chronic pain which costs the nation up to \$635 billion a year in medical treatment and lost productivity. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Relieving-Pain-in-America-A-Blueprint-for-Transforming-Prevention-Care-Education-Research/Report-Brief.aspx>