



Myths about Pain

It is common for children to experience different degrees of pain in different body parts. There are several myths and misconceptions surrounding pain in children. Let's address these myths and provide accurate information:

Why can't we accurately measure pain

Pain is a subjective experience, making it impossible to measure it objectively. However, various assessment tools, including self-reports, behavioural assessments, and integrated tools, can be used to effectively evaluate pain in children.

Is it impossible to measure babies' pain accurately?

Although some babies may not be able to use words to convey their feelings of pain like adults do, they are able to recognise and express their pain. Their behaviour is a key hint of the pain they are having. A change in behaviour, such as facial expression, crying and physical demeanour, can also be used to assess the degree of pain.

If the child says that they are experiencing pain, but it does not seem that they are in pain, is it not necessary to ease the pain?

Every child has a different way of dealing with pain, so their actions may not directly reflect the degree of pain they are experiencing. Some children may engage in distracting activities or appear normal despite experiencing pain. It is important to address their pain based on their reports and overall assessment.

Do children tell us when they feel pain?

Children may not say that they are in pain out of fear or desire to win the favour of others. Avoiding experiencing further pain may also be a possible reason behind doing so, for instance, taking injections. Some children may be worried about being hospitalised, since they will be separated from their parents. Older children may not want to appear vulnerable and may choose not to mention their pain.

Is physical pain of an unknown cause a symptom of a mental or psychological disorder?

Despite continuous research, we still don't have a full understanding on pain. It is impossible for us to determine the cause of pain on the physical level, but we cannot automatically assume that it stems from mental or psychological disorders. Pain is a complicated issue related to the interactions between body and mind, thus only seeing it as a physiological or psychological symptom does not solve the problem.

Is it true that infants are unable to feel pain?

Decades ago, it was believed that the nervous system in infants were not well-developed enough to process pain, providing the reason why they were not able to feel so. Therefore, it was thought that analgesics were not required in medical procedures that did not cause pain, even those operated on infants. Nowadays, it is known that the nervous system of a 26-week-old infant has been well-developed enough to feel pain.

Are children not as sensitive as adults when it comes to pain?

Toddlers have a higher sensitivity to pain than older children and adults. Yet, to some people, their pain sensitivity seems to decrease as they age.

Are infants unable to remember pain?

Infants who are six months old are able to express their fear for pain. This shows that they have bad memories about pain.

Can infants learn how to feel pain from past experiences?

Experiences are not needed to learn how to feel pain. Children will feel pain the first time they are injured.

Are infants and children unable to express pain?

Children may not express pain through words like adults. Yet, most of the time, they are able to express and recognise pain. Their behaviour hints at the pain they are suffering from, including facial expressions, crying and physical cues. Research shows that children under three years old can accurately describe their pain according to the pain measurement scale.

Do children get used to feeling pain?

In this case, it is very much the opposite. For example, when painful medical procedures are repeatedly conducted, children will become more anxious with the increased intensity of pain. Children with chronic pain diseases may also become more sensitive to pain and other stimuli due to a change in the nervous system.

If a child can divert their attention onto other things, does that mean that the pain they are experiencing is not very serious?

Distracting yourself is one of the most effective ways to counter pain. Children being easily distracted by someone, or something does not necessarily mean that the pain they are experiencing is not real. Some would unconsciously do so to alleviate the pain.

Are analgesics dangerous and easily addictive to children?

In fear for addiction or excessive intake, providing opioids for children, such as morphine, is commonly frowned upon. Yet, in fact, as long as highly potent analgesics are administered properly, children are not in any danger more than adults. Unlike drug addicts, children will not develop psychological dependence towards opioids, and it is even more unlikely for them to become addicted to these drugs, as prolonged administration of these drugs may develop drug resistance, a larger dosage must be taken to ease the pain. This does not mean that children will develop addiction towards them. When the demand for easing pain decreases, doctors will adjust the dosage slowly to prevent any adverse physical responses from happening. Similarly, parents are often worried that they shouldn't give infants dummies and sweets to ease their pain, yet this will not become habitual. When these methods are not needed, children will not want dummies and sweets anymore.