

**Part Two**  
**Common problems in people aging with HIV**

**Chapter 3**  
**Pain**

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**Section I. Pain and its importance**

**3-1. Why might people aging with HIV have pain problems?**

Other than the usual causes, people with HIV have HIV-related factors for pain, tingling and numbness. The virus can induce damage to nerves causing these symptoms. Some older HIV pills can also cause nerve damage. Luckily, they are not used often anymore.

**3-2. What happens when you have problems with pain?**

Pain and numbness from nerve damage make you feel bad overall. It can cause depression or anxiety, and can disrupt your day-to-day life. Pain can disturb sleep and make you tired. This makes it hard to work or keep track of things. Sometimes tingling and numbness happen in the feet, causing people to fall and get injured.

**Section II. Pain: what to do with your doctor**

**3-3. Ask if any of your pills could be causing pain**

Ask your doctor if any of your pills can cause the side effect of pain, numbness or tingling. See if you can switch to another pill with fewer side effects.

**3-4. Set pain goals with your doctor**

Pain does not usually get better overnight. As a result, treating pain needs time and patience. It is important to set realistic goals with your doctor, so that you are both on the same page. The goals should focus on 2 things:

- a. *Pain relief*: Set realistic goals about how much pain should decrease, by what time. For example, removing all pain by the next day is usually not realistic. A better goal might be to half the pain by next month. This depends on the kind of pain you have. Talk to your doctor about what is realistic.

- b. *Functional goals:* Ask your doctor about how much function you can expect to regain with pain treatment. Example goals include sleeping without waking up from pain, returning to work, or climbing stairs without help. Tell your doctor about functional goals that are important to you, and work towards them.

### **3-5. Ask if there are options for your pain other than using pills**

Some non-pill treatments can work together with your pain pills to improve your symptoms. Sometimes, they can help you avoid side effects of pain pills by replacing them. Examples include heat, cold, massages, or exercises. Ask your doctor if these options might be right for you.

## **Section III. Pain: what to do on your own**

### **3-6. Take your pills correctly**

Take the right amount of pills at the right time of day. If this is difficult, use a pillbox or ask someone to remind you. This will help you:

- a. *Get better pain control:* It is easier to prevent pain than to get rid of it once it occurs. If you take pills at the right time to prevent pain, it will be easier to control. Sometimes, this means taking pain pills even when there is no pain. Work with your doctor on a pill schedule that meshes with your daily life.
- b. *Avoid side effects:* Too many pain pills can cause sleepiness, problem breathing, overdose and death. Never take more pain pills than what was ordered.

### **3-7. Get enough sleep**

Good sleep heals the body and can help reduce pain. It also puts you in a good mood, which helps you deal with pain better. If you have problem sleeping because of your pain, ask your doctor for help.

### **3-8. Avoid stress**

Stress makes you feel bad overall and can worsen pain. Try to avoid people or situations that make you stressed. If this is hard, talk to your doctor about exercises you can do to relax and reduce stress.