



Illustration: Christian Himmelbach

MY CHILD IS IN PAIN

What can I do for my child?

Non-pharmacological
measures for pain relief



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Legals

Compiled on behalf of
St. Anna Children's Hospital
in cooperation with the pain expert team,
the psychologists and physical therapists
of St. Anna Children's Hospital
May 2016 / Edition 1
Next planned update: 2019

More information: www.stanna.at
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The wording in this brochure is
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Photos: Fotolia
Graphic design: atelier-lev.com

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St. Anna
KinderSpital

Pain is an unpleasant physical and emotional experience for your child and affects many areas of your child's life. Your child might not feel like eating, may not sleep well or may feel too weak to engage in otherwise normal activities. For you as the child's support person, it can often be worrying and distressing if your child is in pain. Nevertheless, there are a few things you can do to help your child. This folder presents a number of non-pharmacological measures you can take to relieve pain.

What is a non-pharmacological measure?

In addition to medication, there are also other ways to relieve your child's pain. These measures aim to improve your child's well-being. They can be applied before, during as well as after your child undergoes a painful experience.

Cognitive and sensory measures

These can be methods that make avail of the manner of thinking (cognitive) and the child's imagination, on the one hand. On the other hand, it is also possible to favourably affect the way your child feels physical sensations by using special exercises.

- **Distraction:** With this method, your child learns to focus its attention on something other than the pain. This can be achieved through activities such as painting, being read to, watching TV, playing board games or game apps. Some wards provide finger puppets, musical pull toys, light-up balls, books, etc. for this purpose.
- **Imagination (magic journey):** Imagining himself or herself in a favourite or imaginary place can help your child relax and feel safe. Ask your child what he or she sees, smells, tastes, hears and feels while in this place.
- **Coping strategies:** Positive thought patterns such as „I can handle this“ or „I can do this“ can interrupt negative ones.

- **Music and dance:** Listening to music, singing and dancing can distract your child from the pain or calm him/her.
- **Relaxation exercises:** Breathing exercises can relax and calm your child. Examples for this are deep breathing into the abdomen and blowing, e.g. to make a pinwheel turn.

The psychologists, psychotherapists and nurses will support and guide you in this regard. Please ask us!

Physical measures

By providing external stimuli and adjusting the environment, these measures help to reduce your child's pain.

- **Massage, physical and occupational therapy:** Active or passive exercise and positioning are very effective when it comes to relieving pain. Massaging back, arms and legs can help your child relax. Massages can be combined with music, breathing exercises and imagination exercises (magic journey).

Heat and cooling applications:

Some types of pain can be relieved by applying heat whilst others may improve with cold. We recommend use of heat or cold pads. During application, it is important to observe for visible redness or very pale skin. Please do not apply if the ability to perceive temperature is disturbed. **Cold** has an analgesic, anti-inflammatory and decongestant effect. Keep the cold pad in the refrigerator. Never place

it directly on the skin and do not use it for longer than 10 minutes. Use it only for children older than 6 months of age!

Heat has a muscle-relaxing, digestive, expectorant and antitussive effect. Please do not use for acute inflammations and fresh bone fractures! After warming up the gel pad, always check temperature prior to application.

- **Electrotherapy:** Low-frequency electric currents are used to relieve pain.

The physical therapists, occupational therapists and nurses will support and guide you in this regard. Please ask us!

Information is important!

Explain to your child what will happen during a treatment or procedure, e.g. with the aid of a stuffed animal, a picture book or a toy medical kit. As you do this, your child can ask questions that preoccupy him/her and perhaps help your child understand why a treatment is necessary. This can reduce anxiety and the fear of the unknown and comfort your child.

What non-pharmacological measure is right for my child?

Different measures can help depending on the child and situation. You can ask your child's treatment team for assistance in this matter. If needed, you will be trained to help your child with exercises.

