

Mercy Insights

Health care's bright spot

FALL 2011

PAIN MANAGEMENT

Mercy Hospital Offers New Options for Pain



Suffering from Chronic Pain?

Talk with your doctor. If you might benefit from these types of injections, your doctor can write an order to have this done by Clark Kruta, CRNA, Same Day Surgery Department, Mercy Hospital. For more information, call Clark at **701-845-6519**.

FOR MADDI SETTELMAYER,

coping with back pain had become a daily challenge. A 20-year-old student at the University of Mary in Bismarck, Settelmeyer was diagnosed with a herniated—ruptured—disk in her lower spine. For nearly a year, she couldn't find relief. "I took ibuprofen and pain medication, and I did exercises to try to strengthen my back muscles," says Settelmeyer. "But the pain just worsened." She finally got relief after receiving an epidural injection at Mercy Hospital.

How an Epidural Injection Can Help

An epidural injection delivers a steroid medication into the area surrounding the spine. The steroid reduces inflammation and swelling, usually caused by a pinched nerve, ruptured or bulging disk, or injury. Lumbar—or lower back—injections are offered right here at Mercy Hospital. These typically help people with pain that radiates from the back to the buttocks or legs.

Other Strategies to Manage Pain

To help more people suffering from chronic pain, Mercy Hospital is expanding its services. "We are now providing trigger point and sacroiliac injections," says Clark Kruta, CRNA, a nurse anesthetist at Mercy Hospital.

- ▶ **Trigger points.** This is a portion of a muscle that is always contracting. Injecting an anesthetic or steroid into the trigger point makes it relax and reduces inflammation. "Blood can flow into the area again, allowing the muscle to heal," Kruta says. These injections can help

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'Speak Up When It Hurts'

What You Need to Know About Managing Your Pain

Acute and chronic pain can not only affect your lifestyle, but also your recovery from an illness or surgery.

It is for that reason that one of the most important things you can do is "speak up when it hurts." Your report of pain is the best indicator that you are having pain. Your nurse will ask you to rate your pain, usually on a scale of zero to 10. This helps determine how strong your pain is. Your nurse might also ask you where it hurts, how long you have been in pain, and what makes it better or worse. He or she will also ask you to set a "comfort goal"—this is the pain level that is acceptable to you. It is not always possible to totally remove all the pain, but Mercy Hospital is here to make you as comfortable as possible.

Several of the ways that your pain can be relieved or controlled include:

- ▶ Pain medications
- ▶ Heat or cold therapy
- ▶ Massage
- ▶ Physical therapy
- ▶ Mind/body techniques

Several pain management treatment options may be used to help relieve your pain. But the most important thing to remember is that no one knows you are experiencing pain unless you tell someone. That is why it's important to "speak up when it hurts," so Mercy Hospital staff can make you as comfortable as possible.



Clark Kruta, CRNA, nurse anesthetist, is pictured assessing a patient's neck and back for trigger point injections.

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people with muscle-related pain, including muscle spasm, stiffness, and pain that worsens as the day goes on.

▶ **Sacroiliac joint.** This joint sits between the tailbone and pelvic bone. An inflamed joint can cause low back pain, difficulty going up and down stairs, and other movement problems. Injecting a steroid directly into the joint lessens pain and inflammation.

What to Expect

With any of the types of pain management procedures, patients come in on an outpatient basis. It usually takes an hour or less. Fluoroscopy, a type of X-ray, may be used to guide placement of the needle. The injection may cause temporary soreness, but you can typically return to your usual activities the next day. You might feel pain relief right away or in the next day or two.

Although the injections don't cure the underlying condition, they can

"Before I got the injections, I really couldn't do anything. Once I got an epidural injection, I could play, sit, and stand more without pain. I even played football with my friends."
—Maddi Settelmeier

break the cycle of inflammation and pain so the tissue and nerves have a chance to heal. The injections are given weeks or months apart, and the number needed is different for each patient. They won't help everyone, Kruta says, but they may be worth trying when other approaches haven't worked.

"Before I got the injections, I really couldn't do anything," Settelmeier says. "Once I got an epidural injection, I could play, sit, and stand more without pain. I even played football with my friends."

How to Care for Sprains and Strains

SOFT TISSUE injuries such as sprains and strains are common occurrences with summertime athletes and the general population. Most people are uncertain whether many of these injuries need emergency care or can be dealt with at home.

Sprains are damage to the ligaments that support our joints and strains are damage to muscles or tendons, explains Mike Bresnahan, physical therapist at Mercy Hospital (Valley City).



Mike Bresnahan, physical therapist

Severe sprains could include dislocation of a joint and pain along the shaft of a bone could indicate a fracture. These injuries do vary significantly in terms of severity and some do require emergency care.

Severe pain is the most common sign that urgent care is needed. Pain along the shaft of the bone or severe pain in a joint with significant swelling probably requires emergency attention, especially if the joint seems unstable. If an extremity turns blue, or there is numbness or tingling, a person should also seek emergency care.

For injuries that do not create uncontrollable pain, the acute care can often be dealt with at home. To treat less severe injuries, remember the acronym RICE, says Bresnahan:



Jacob Thurston is a third-year VCSU student who has been receiving physical therapy on his shoulder. He tore a tendon last fall playing football and had surgery to repair it in March. He has been seeing Grant Goven, PT, for his therapy and says, "Grant is good for taking the time to make sure I understand my precautions, like not lifting too much." He is hoping to have a full recovery and be at full strength to play football again this fall.

- ▶ Rest it
- ▶ Ice it
- ▶ Compress it
- ▶ Elevate it

This treatment should help control swelling and minimize symptoms during the first several days.

Follow-Up Care

Minor injuries normally start to improve after three or four days. If swelling does not start to reduce and normal motion and function do not return by the third or fourth day, people should pursue medical attention. Your local

physician or a physical therapist would be an appropriate place to begin. Many soft tissue injuries, especially ligament and tendon injuries, require rehabilitation to restore normal function. Most third-party payers, including Blue Cross Blue Shield, allow patients to see a physical therapist without a physician referral. All Medicare patients need to be referred by a physician first.

To schedule a physical therapy appointment, please call 701-845-6575.

MERCY INSIGHTS is published as a community service for the friends and partners of MERCY HOSPITAL, 570 Chataqua Blvd., Valley City, ND 58072-3199, telephone 701-845-6400, www.mercyhospitalvalleycity.org.

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What Is a Concussion?

A CONCUSSION is a brain injury that changes how cells in the brain normally work. It happens from a blow to the head or body that causes the brain to move suddenly inside the skull. Even what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. Concussions can also result from a fall or from athletes colliding with each other or with obstacles, like a goalpost.

Valley City High School is adjusting the protocol for concussions sustained during an athletic event. All athletes entering the seventh grade, or new athletes entering the school system, are given their first "Impact Test" to establish a concussion baseline to be compared with in the event a concussion occurs. This test is supervised by the athletic director, athletic trainer, or other administrative personnel.

New legislation requires school athletes who show signs of a concussion be cleared by a medical professional before they can resume playing. The rule only applies to school sports.

As a parent you may want to know a few facts about concussions.

The Facts

Affected athletes may not report their symptoms for fear of losing playing time or their position. But they

shouldn't take it lightly. A concussion:

- ▶ Is a *serious brain injury*
- ▶ Can occur without loss of consciousness
- ▶ Can happen even when an athlete is wearing a helmet
- ▶ Should receive the proper management when it first occurs, which can help prevent further injury or death

Whether playing sports or falling at home, there are some signs of a concussion parents can look for. Your child:

- ▶ Appears to be dazed or stunned
- ▶ Is confused about instruction
- ▶ Answers questions slowly
- ▶ Can't recall events before or after the hit or fall

Someone with the following symptoms should be taken to the ER right away:

- ▶ Headache or "pressure" in the head
- ▶ Nausea or vomiting
- ▶ Balance problems or dizziness
- ▶ Double or blurry vision
- ▶ Sensitivity to light or noise
- ▶ Concentration or memory problems
- ▶ Confusion

To learn more about concussions and care after one has happened, go to www.mayoclinic.com and search for "concussion."



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Setting the Records Straight

Your medical records play a vital role in your care at Mercy Hospital. And Janell Kunze, RHIT, makes sure those records are complete, correct, and secure.



"Organization and accuracy are so important in the health information field," says Kunze.

You might meet Kunze if you stop by Mercy's Medical Records Department to sign a release form so that your records can be sent to a new doctor. Most of her other work is behind the scenes, but no less critical. For example, she enters special codes into a computer so insurance can process your claims. And she types up notes dictated by your doctor so they can be added to your chart.

"I've been at Mercy for 27 years. I really like the closeness of the staff," Kunze says. After hours, you can find her keeping meticulous track of strikes and spares as head of the Women's Bowling Association in Valley City.

Janell Kunze, RHIT