FAST FACTS: Positioning as Nondrug Pain Treatment

Positioning: Assisting your loved one to stay in a comfortable position

✓ Benefits of Positioning:
  o Helps with managing pain
  o Decreases risk of complications such as pressure ulcers (bedsores)
  o Helps maintain range of motion and improve circulation

✓ Recommendations for Positioning and Stretching
  o Use pillows to support your loved one
    ▪ A full body pillow can be used to position your loved one on their side
    ▪ When your loved one is laying on their side, make sure their ear is flat on the pillow and not turned under
  o Gently bend and straighten arms and legs while helping your loved one turn (do not force joints or muscles beyond a place of comfort)
    ▪ Use your loved one’s reactions as a guide for what is comfortable
  o Certain sleeping positions are recommended for different pain sites
    ▪ Neck Pain/Stiffness: on back or side with a pillow that holds head in neutral
    ▪ Shoulder Pain: on good side or back with pillow to support painful shoulder
    ▪ Back Pain: on back with pillows under knees
    ▪ Hip Pain: on back with pillow under knees or on good side with pillow between knees
    ▪ Knee Pain: on side with non-painful knee and pillow between knees or on back with pillow under both knees
  o Decreased mobility and increased friction, or the rubbing of skin on a surface, can lead to pressure ulcers. The best prevention is frequent repositioning
    ▪ Help your loved one reposition every 2 hours
    ▪ If in bed, using drawsheets to reposition can help prevent injury to both you and your loved one. Do this by folding a thin sheet twice in half lengthwise and placing it under your loved one so that their bottom and lower to mid back are on the sheet
    ▪ If in a chair, prop your loved one’s feet and keep their hips bent at 90 degrees using a stool or ottoman and pillows
  o If your loved one can sit up, suggest they pretend to “write” the alphabet in the air using their feet or arms to support stretching and range of motion
They can alternate arms or feet writing six letters at a time

- Example: Right Foot: A, B, C, D, E, F; Left Foot: G, H, I, J, K, L

✔ **What else the Caregiver should do?**

- Consider using a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information on a regular basis (i.e. document your loved one’s pain level prior to repositioning and after)
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary

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**Adapted from**

2. The Nursing Home Pain Management Algorithm Clinical Trial, R01 NR009100, 7/1/05 – 4/30/10; Mary Ersek (PI) Used with permission of Mary Ersek and HPNA (2009).

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