

pain and their disappearance after the inciting procedure or the administration of analgesia. A pain assessment record is used to document indications of pain and the effectiveness of interventions (see [Pain Assessment, Chapter 5](#)).

The use of opioids, such as morphine, to relieve pain is controversial because they may mask signs of altered consciousness or depress respirations. However, unrelieved pain activates the stress response, which can elevate ICP. To block the stress response, some authorities advocate the use of analgesics, sedatives, and, in some cases such as head injury, paralyzing agents via continuous IV infusion. A commonly used combination is fentanyl, midazolam, and vecuronium (Norcuron). If there are concerns about assessing the LOC or respiratory depression, naloxone (Narcan) can be used to reverse the opioid effects. Regardless of which drugs are used, adequate dosage and regular administration are essential to provide optimal pain relief (see [Pain Management, Chapter 5](#)).

Other measures to relieve discomfort include providing a quiet, dimly lit environment; limiting visitors; preventing any sudden, jarring movement, such as banging into the bed; and preventing an increase in ICP. The latter is most effectively achieved by proper positioning and prevention of straining, such as during coughing, vomiting, and defecating. Antiepileptic drugs may be ordered for control of seizure activity.

Drug Alert

When opioids are used, bowel elimination must be closely monitored because of the potential constipating effect. A stool softener should be given regularly with laxatives as needed to prevent constipation.

Respiratory Management

Respiratory effectiveness is the primary concern in the care of the unconscious child, and establishment of an adequate airway is *always* the first priority. Carbon dioxide has a potent vasodilating effect and will increase cerebral blood flow (CBF) and ICP. Cerebral hypoxia at normal body temperature that lasts longer than 4 minutes nearly always causes irreversible brain damage.