

## Cancer Pain Management

It is common for patients with cancer to feel pain. Your care team can help you manage pain so you have a level of comfort that allows you to do your daily activities. Tell your care team right away if you are feeling pain. Getting help for your pain early makes treatment more effective.

When pain is not managed well, it may interfere with many things:

- Daily activities and your ability to function
- Sleep
- Appetite
- Enjoying friends, family and other pleasures of life
- Response to treatment

### Causes of Cancer Pain

There are many causes of cancer pain. Most cancer pain occurs when a tumor presses on bone, nerves or body organs. Cancer treatment can also cause pain.

You may also have pain that has nothing to do with cancer. Like everyone else, you can get headaches, muscle strains and other aches and pains. Other conditions, such as arthritis, can also cause pain. Pain from these other conditions can be treated along with cancer pain. Ask your care team what you can do to manage these everyday aches and pains.

### Treating Cancer Pain

There are many types of medicines and methods available to manage your cancer pain. You can buy effective pain relievers without a doctor's prescription. These pain relievers are called **nonprescription** or **over-the-counter** medicine. A prescription from your doctor is needed for stronger types of pain medicines.

Non-medicine treatments such as relaxation techniques can also help. The following techniques may give you some relief and can be used by themselves or with your medicine.

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Biofeedback                        | • Acupuncture  |
| • Breathing and relaxation exercises | • Distraction  |
| • Music therapy                      | • Rest   |
| • Prayer or meditation               | • Heating pads and hot or cold packs                 |
| • Imagery                            | • Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) |
| • Massage, pressure or vibration     |  |

## Types of Pain Medicine

Many medicines, called **analgesics**, are used to treat cancer pain. Your doctor may give you one or more of these to take. Pain medicines work differently for different people. At first, you may need to adjust the amount and type of medicine. Work with your doctor to find an effective combination. It is important to know the benefits and risks of each type of pain medicine.

### Non-Opioids for Mild to Moderate Pain

Examples include acetaminophen and NSAIDs – nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin and ibuprofen. Other examples may include topical medicines like lidocaine patches or cream. You may buy many of these over-the-counter medicines without a prescription. Others may need a prescription.

- **Benefits:** They manage mild to moderate pain. You can buy some without a prescription.
- **Risks:** NSAIDs can cause an upset stomach, bleeding in the stomach, slow blood clotting and kidney problems. Acetaminophen does not cause these side effects, but high doses can hurt the liver. These medicines can hide a fever. Tell your doctor if you are taking NSAIDs.

### Opioids for Moderate to Severe Pain

Examples include morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone and codeine. A prescription is needed. Non-opioids may sometimes be used with the opioids for moderate to severe pain.

- **Benefits:** These medicines manage moderate to severe pain and do not cause bleeding.
- **Risks:** They may cause constipation, sleepiness, nausea and vomiting. Opioids sometimes cause problems with urination or itching. They may also slow breathing, especially when they are first given, but it is not common in people who take opioids on a regular basis.

### Antidepressants for Tingling and Burning Pain

Examples include amitriptyline, imipramine, doxepin and duloxetine. A prescription is needed. Taking an antidepressant for pain management does not mean that you are depressed or have a mental illness. Tell your doctor if you are already taking antidepressants.

- **Benefits:** Antidepressants help manage tingling or burning pain from damaged nerves. They may also improve sleep.
- **Risks:** These medicines may cause dry mouth, sleepiness and constipation. Some can cause you to feel dizzy and lightheaded when you stand up too quickly.

### Anti-Epileptics for Tingling and Burning Pain

Examples include gabapentin, pregabalin and other medicines. A prescription is needed. Taking an anti-epileptic for pain management does not mean that you are going to have seizures.

- **Benefits:** They help to manage tingling or burning from nerve injury.
- **Risks:** They may hurt the liver and lower the number of red and white cells in the blood. It is important to have regular blood tests to check for these side effects.

### Steroids for Pain Caused by Swelling

Examples include prednisone and dexamethasone. A prescription is needed.

- **Benefits:** They help relieve bone pain, pain caused by spinal cord and brain tumors and pain caused by inflammation. Steroids also increase appetite.

- **Risks:** They may cause fluid to build up in the body or cause bleeding and irritation to the stomach. Confusion is a problem for some patients when they take steroids. Steroids may also increase blood sugar levels, mainly in patients with diabetes.

## When to Take Pain Medicine

### Around-the-Clock Schedule

When you take your medicine on a regular schedule, this is called **around-the-clock**. Having a set time to take your medicine helps to keep pain under control. **Do not** skip a dose or wait for the pain to get worse. This method builds up a steady level of pain medicine in the body, which helps prevent a pain crisis.

### Breakthrough Pain

Even when you take your medicines on a regular schedule, you may still have sudden spikes in pain. This is called **breakthrough** pain. If this happens, you may use additional medicine **as needed** to treat spikes in pain not managed by the scheduled medicine. Medicines taken as needed for breakthrough pain usually last for 2 to 4 hours.



Taking more than 4 doses of a breakthrough medicine a day is often a sign that the around-the-clock medicine needs to be adjusted. **Do not** increase the dose or how often you take your medicines unless you talk to your care team first. Changing your dose or how often you take your medicine without talking with your care team first can cause serious side effects, like trouble breathing or even death.

Tell your care team if some activities, like riding in a car, increase your pain. You may need an extra dose of pain medicine beforehand. It is easier to prevent pain than control it once it starts.

## Side Effects of Pain Medicines

All medicines can cause side effects, but not everyone gets them or they may be different for some people. Most side effects occur in the first few hours of treatment and slowly go away. There are many common side effects of pain medicines:

- Constipation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sleepiness
- Slowed breathing
- Itching

Most side effects improve within 3 to 5 days of starting or adjusting pain medicine. But, you may still have constipation. Follow your care team's instructions for treating and preventing constipation while taking pain medicine.



Serious side effects of pain medicines are not common. If they happen, it is usually in the first few hours of treatment. These can include trouble breathing, dizziness and rashes. If you have any of these symptoms, call your care team **right away**.

## Other Pain Treatments

Cancer pain is often treated with medicine. However, radiation, surgery and other treatments in addition to pain medicine can provide relief. Some people may need extra help to manage pain. If so, your doctor may suggest the following options.

- **Radiation therapy.** It reduces pain by shrinking a tumor. A single dose of radiation may be effective for some people.
- **Nerve blocks or implanted pain pump.** Some nerve blocks, either temporary or permanent, may help relieve pain. Implanted pain pumps can also be very helpful in some cases.
- **Spinal cord stimulator.** This is a device that sends electrical signals to certain areas of the spinal cord to help treat pain.
- **Spine surgery.** Kyphoplasty and vertebroplasty are procedures that can be done to relieve pain from compression fractures.
- **Neurosurgery.** Pain nerves, usually in the spinal cord, are cut to relieve the pain.
- **Surgery.** If a tumor is pressing on nerves or other parts of the body, surgery to remove all or part of the tumor can help relieve pain.

## Common Concerns

Tell your care team if you have concerns or fears about pain management. The care team can explain or adjust your treatment plan. Here are common concerns and supportive facts.

**Concern:** I will become "hooked on" or "addicted to" pain medicine.

**Fact:** It is not common to get addicted to pain medicine when taken as prescribed for cancer pain. Your doctor will check your dose, usage and risk for addiction often. Addiction can be treated and should not stop you from taking medicine to manage pain.

**Concern:** If I take too much medicine, it will stop working.

**Fact:** The medicine is still working, but your body may get used to it. This is called **tolerance**. The doctor can change the amount of medicine or add other medicines to help.

**Concern:** The side effects will be worse than the pain relief I will get.

**Fact:** Most common side effects of pain medicines, like constipation, can be managed.

**Concern:** I should take medicine or treatments only when I am in pain.

**Fact:** Take your pain medicine on schedule, even if you do not feel pain. You can also take short-acting pain medicine if you have extra pain. Use other treatments like relaxation, breathing exercises and hot or cold packs whenever you want.

**Concern:** If I complain too much, I am not being a good patient.

**Fact:** Taking care of your pain is important. It is OK to tell your care team if you have pain or if it gets worse. They can help you manage your pain.

## Calling About a Pain Problem

When you call about a pain problem, it helps if you can answer these questions. Use the pain management log at the end of this document to track your information.

- What are your pain levels from the previous day on a scale of 0 to 10? Is it the highest, lowest, or usual pain you have had?
- What are your symptoms and what is their level on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had?
- Are you taking your regular around-the-clock medicine as prescribed? If not, how often are you taking it?
- What is the number of breakthrough doses you are taking each day?
- What makes your pain worse? What makes it better?
- When was your last bowel movement? Are you following a bowel management plan?

## Pain Management Log

It is important to see your care team for regular follow-up appointments so they can check your pain, your pain management plan and any side effects you may be having. You or your caregiver may find it helpful to keep track of pain levels and medicines. Use this log to note when your pain is not well managed or before going to the clinic.

My personal pain goal is level \_\_\_\_\_.

Date and Time	Pain Level 😊 0 - 10 ☹️	Location of Pain	Medicine and Dose	Other Treatments	Comments
(Example) May 6, 8 a.m.	6	Back of head, neck	Morphine 5mg tablet	Tried massage	Did not sleep well.

## Things to Remember When Using Pain Medicine

Do These Actions	Do Not Do These Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always take pain medicine only as directed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Do not</b> cut, chew, crush or dissolve extended release tablets or capsules.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only get prescriptions for pain medicine from your center.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Do not</b> cut a pain patch or expose it to heat, like a heating pad, hot tub or hot shower, while the patch is on your skin.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let your nurse know if you need to get pain medicine from somewhere else, such as in an emergency or from a dentist for dental work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Never share, sell or trade your pain medicine with anyone. <b>Do not</b> use someone else's medicines for pain or any other condition.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell your other doctors about the pain medicines you are taking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Never use pain medicines to help you sleep or combine with any sleep aid, such as tranquilizers or sedatives.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring any unused medicine to the clinic. The care team will regularly test your urine, saliva or blood for specific drugs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Do not</b> use illegal drugs like cocaine, heroin or meth. <b>Do not</b> use marijuana, even if it is legal, or drink alcohol without permission from your prescribing doctor.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask for pain medicine refills during regular office or clinic hours only. Early refills for lost, stolen or spoiled medicine may not be allowed, depending on the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Do not</b> drive a car or use heavy equipment when taking pain medicine.</li> </ul>