



CANCERcare®

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Fact sheet

Opening the Door to Effective Pain Management: Getting the Facts and Getting Help

Cancer-related pain can be physically and emotionally exhausting, but there are many ways to manage this side effect. The first step is to tell your doctor or nurse how you feel. He or she may ask you to rate your pain – for example, on a scale of zero to 10, in which zero equals no pain and 10 is the worst pain possible. Rating your pain helps your health care team get a better sense of how you feel so they can select the best way to provide you with relief.

Here are some helpful hints for managing cancer-related pain:

Recognize pain as a message that your body needs help. Pain medicines and pain-relieving techniques are available to give you relief and improve your quality of life during cancer treatment.

Talk to your health care team about your pain. Assessing pain and treating it are just as important as checking your blood pressure or listening to your heartbeat. Pain needs to be reassessed during each medical appointment.

Bring a family member or friend to medical appointments. He or she may remember details about your pain that you have forgotten. This will help your doctors have a more accurate picture of your pain.

Keep a “pain journal.” Keeping a journal gives you a record of how your pain medication is working, any side effects you are experiencing, and your emotions throughout the day.

Some of the things you may want to write down include:

- Where and when the pain occurs
- How often and how quickly the pain arises
- How long the pain lasts
- What makes the pain worse
- Whether anything, such as heat, ice or medicine, eases the pain
- How long your pain-relieving technique works and how much relief it provides
- Any side effects you experience when taking pain medication
- How the pain is affecting your quality of life – for example, is it keeping you from sleeping, eating, walking, working or exercising?



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Explore non-medical pain management techniques.

These can include such things as meditation, yoga, guided imagery techniques, and relaxation exercises. Some cancer centers have programs to teach patients the basics of these techniques. There are also a number of commercial books available on the subject.

If a pain medication is not working, let your doctor know. He or she may increase the dosage or frequency of your medication, or try a new medication or pain-relief technique.

Don't be alarmed if your doctor increases the dosage of your pain medicine. At times, the amount of pain medicine your body needs may increase. This can happen because your body has built up a "tolerance" to the medication. Tolerance means that your body is no longer responding to the drug or that the amount of pain has increased. *Your pain medication is a medical treatment; it is not a form of emotional dependence on the drug.* Experiencing tolerance does not mean that you are addicted to your pain medication.



Remember: you are the expert on your pain, and your health care team is there to help you manage it. Effective pain management improves a person's quality of life and is a basic human right. So get involved and be an active participant with your doctor in managing your pain.

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers are available to help you cope with cancer and treatment side effects. We provide free individual counseling and support over the phone, online and in person. CancerCare also offers education, practical help, and referrals to other resources that can help you manage your concerns related to cancer. To learn more about how we help, call us at **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit **www.cancer.org**.



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