

Getting Help for Cancer Pain

Pain is something that hurts. Only you know when you have pain and how it feels to you. Tell your doctor and nurse about your pain right away – it is easier to treat pain when it first starts.

Pain is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong. But having cancer does not always mean that you will have pain. And if you have pain, it can be caused by other things besides your cancer. All pain can and should be treated.



Cancer pain can be caused by:

- The cancer itself
- Cancer treatment
- Tests that are done

You can also have pain from headaches or arthritis.

Pain can affect all parts of your life. If you have pain:

- You may not be able to do the things you need to do.
- You may have trouble sleeping and eating.
- You may feel tired or “down” all the time.
- You may be cranky, frustrated, sad, and even angry.

Loved ones may not understand how you are feeling, and you may feel very alone in your distress.

Some facts about cancer pain treatment:

- Cancer pain can almost always be controlled.
- Controlling pain is part of good cancer care.
- The best way to control cancer pain is to keep it from ever starting and keep it from getting worse.
- You have a right to ask for pain control.
- People who take cancer pain medicines the way the doctor or nurse tells them to rarely become addicted to them.
- Most people do not get high or lose control when they take cancer pain medicines the way they are told to.
- There are things you can do to manage or even prevent side effects from pain medicines.

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How to talk about your pain

Step 1: Use a pain scale to explain how much pain you have.



Step 2: Describe your pain.
Some words you might use are:

- Dull
- Sharp
- Aching
- Throbbing
- Burning
- Shooting
- Stabbing

Step 3: Tell your cancer care team:

- Where you have pain
- How long it lasts
- What makes it better or worse
- If it stops you from doing things you want to do
- What you have tried to make the pain better and whether it worked

Pain medicine

There are many medicines, many ways to take the medicines, and many treatments without drugs that can help relieve your pain. Work with your cancer care team to find the cancer pain treatment that works best for you.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your doctor or nurse about pain medicine:

- How much medicine should I take? How often can I take it?
- If it doesn't work, can I take more?
- Should I call you before taking more?
- What if I forget to take it or take it too late?
- Should I take my medicine with food?
- How long does it take the medicine to start working?
- Is it safe to drink alcohol, drive, or operate machinery after I have taken pain medicine?

- What other medicines can I take with the pain medicine?
- What medicines should I stop taking while I'm taking the pain medicine?
- What side effects could I have from the medicine, how can I prevent them, and what should I do if I have them?

When cancer pain is relieved, you are able to:

- Enjoy being active.
- Sleep better.
- Enjoy family and friends.
- Eat better.
- Enjoy sex.
- Prevent depression.
- Do the things you need or want to do.

Do not accept pain as a normal part of having cancer. You have a right to pain relief.



We **save lives** and create more birthdays by helping you stay well, helping you get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back.

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