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## Other Medical Treatments for Cancer Pain

If your cancer pain isn't being relieved by drugs or non-medical methods, other types of treatments may be an option.

### Treatments to stop or lessen pain impulses

#### Surgery

Pain can't be felt if the nerve pathways that carry pain impulses or signals to the brain are interrupted. To block these pathways, a neurosurgeon may cut nerves, usually near the spinal cord. When the nerves that relay pain are cut, pain, pressure, and temperature can no longer be felt – the area becomes numb.

Only surgeons with special skills, who are also experts in pain management, should do this kind of surgery. These surgeons normally work with other pain specialists to explore other methods of pain control before they cut nerves – this treatment cannot be reversed.

#### Nerve block

A nerve block is a procedure where a local anesthetic (a numbing drug), often combined with a steroid, is injected into or around a nerve or into the space around the spinal cord to block pain. After the injection, the nerve is no longer able to relay pain so the pain is relieved for some time. For longer-lasting pain relief, phenol or alcohol can be injected. A nerve block may cause muscle paralysis or a loss of all feeling in the affected area.

#### Spinal analgesia

Low doses of pain medicine may be injected into the fluid around the spine (called **intrathecal injection**). If this works, a tube and a pump may be used to deliver the pain medicine right into the spinal fluid to control the pain. Morphine is often used for this purpose, and you can still have side effects like itching and constipation. You will need surgery to put the small pump and tube into your body.

### **Epidural or intrathecal injections**

Certain kinds of pain may respond to pain medicine that's injected into the space around the layers of the spine. If this works, a pump can be implanted so that you can get pain medicines right around the nerves. This may cause numbness or weakness of the treated area.

### **Neuroablation**

Neuroablation may be helpful for some pain. It uses heat therapy (through radiofrequency or ultrasound) or cold therapy (cryotherapy) to reduce pain.

### **Nerve stimulation**

There are different types of nerve stimulation therapies that may be an option for treating certain types of cancer-related pain. Research is continuing on these methods for pain control.

- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS): Uses low-voltage electric current to the skin at the area of pain with a small, battery-powered machine.
- Spinal cord stimulation: Uses a device to send mild electric currents to block nerves in the spine.
- Peripheral nerve stimulation: Uses small electrodes to send mild electric currents to peripheral nerves, which are located outside the brain and spinal cord.

### **Treatments to shrink the tumor**

Sometimes, even when treatment can't cure the cancer, it can shrink the size of a tumor that's pressing on nerves and organs and causing pain. Cancer treatments like [chemo](#)<sup>1</sup>, hormone therapy, or [radiation](#)<sup>2</sup> may be used in this way.

Radioactive injections are sometimes used when the cancer has spread to many places in the bone – the radioactive drug settles in the bones near the cancer to help stop its

growth and relieve pain.

In some cases, other treatments like [radiofrequency ablation](#)<sup>3</sup> can be used in certain areas of the body. In this treatment, electrodes are put in near the tumor to heat and destroy the cancer.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/radiation.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/radiation.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/hyperthermia.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/hyperthermia.html)

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