Get Help for Cancer Pain
Pain does not have to be part of cancer.

If you have cancer, you may have pain. But you can do something about it. Treating pain is a key part of cancer treatment. There are many medicines for pain your doctor can give you. (Doctors and nurses often call them “pain meds” for short.)

Pain can change your life in lots of ways. Pain can make it hard to do everyday things, like wash, dress, and brush your teeth. It can cause trouble with work, too. Pain meds can help you have a more normal life.
Pain can make you feel:

- Tired
- Mad
- On edge
- Lonely
- Stressed
- Worried
- Depressed

Pain can make it hard to:

- Eat.
- Sleep.
- Care for kids or grandkids.
- Take care of yourself.
- Find joy in life.
- Take part in hobbies and other things you like to do.
- Work (at home or at your job).
- Enjoy time with your friends and family.

Cancer pain can almost always be helped with meds. Being free from pain can help you feel stronger. It can help you cope better with cancer and enjoy your life more.
The first step is telling your cancer care team about your pain.

**Tell them:**

**How bad it hurts.** Rank your pain from 0 to 10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can think of.

**What the pain feels like.** People use different words to talk about different kinds of pain:

- Sharp
- Dull
- Stabbing
- Throbbing
- Flashing
- Shooting
- Stinging
- Shock-like
- Tingling
- Numb
- Aching
- Cramping
- Pulling
- Tight
- Pressing
- Pinching
- Crushing
- Cold
- Burning
Give them details:

• Where it hurts

• When it started

• How often you have pain

• What makes your pain worse

• What makes your pain better

• How much help you get with the meds you take now

Ask them:

• What’s causing my pain?

• What can you give me to help my pain?

• How and when should I take each med? For how long?

• Do I need to take the meds with food?

• What are the common side effects? What should I do if I have side effects?

• Can I still drive or work while I take these meds?

• What should I do if the meds don’t make my pain better?

• Is it safe to take my other meds with these?

• What else can I do to help my pain?
Don’t let these fears keep you in pain:

Fear you’ll become an addict
Taking meds for pain is not the same as taking them for pleasure. When pain meds are taken the right way, addiction is very rare. Be sure you know how to take your meds. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist (druggist) about how to take them safely.

Fear of being a whiner
Asking for help with pain is not a sign of weakness. Doctors know it’s best to treat pain when you first have it. Pain can also be an early warning sign of sickness or side effects of cancer treatment. Tell your cancer care team about your pain right away.

Fear of losing control
Most people do not get “high” or lose control when they take pain meds the right way. Side effects from meds can be treated. Sometimes they can even be kept from happening in the first place. You may feel sleepy after starting new pain meds, but this should go away in a few days.
Getting pain meds

Be sure only one doctor prescribes your pain meds. If one of your doctors changes your meds, they should be sure your other doctors know about it.

Never take someone else’s meds or let someone else take yours. Don’t take old pain meds that you have left over; they may not be right for you now. And some meds may cause problems with your cancer treatment drugs. Find out how to take your meds safely.

You have a right to pain relief.

Talk to your cancer care team about your pain. Ask for help when you need it. It can take time to get your meds just right. Keep working with your team until you feel better.

For more about information about cancer pain or any other cancer problems, visit the American Cancer Society website at www.cancer.org or call us at 1-800-227-2345. We’re here when you need us – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Pain should not be accepted as part of having cancer or getting cancer treatment. Read this to learn more about getting help with cancer pain.

For the latest cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **1-800-227-2345**. We’re here for you every step of the way.