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 or non-medicine methods your doctor can suggest to help with your pain. (Your cancer care team may call pain medicines “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 also make it hard for you to do your job. Talk about your pain with your cancer care team so they can help.
Pain can make you feel:

- Tired
- 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 be treated. It may not go away completely, but having less pain or no pain can help you feel stronger. It can also 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.** Your cancer care team may use a pain scale and ask you to rank your pain from 0 to 10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can think of. If you don’t think numbers are the best way for you to describe your pain, ask your cancer care team if they have different pain tools, like a pain scale that uses faces instead of numbers.

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

- Sharp
- Dull
- Stabbing
- Throbbing
- Shooting
- Stinging
- Tingling
- Numb
- Aching
- Cramping
- Pulling
- Tight
- Pinching
- Burning
Give them details:

- Where it hurts
- When it started
- How often you have pain
- How long the pain lasts
- What makes your pain worse
- What makes your pain better
- What meds you’re taking for the pain and how much relief you get from them

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?
Questions you may have about taking pain meds:

Can my pain meds cause addiction?

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 or cancer care team about how to take them safely.

What if I have new pain or my pain medicine doesn’t help my pain?

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. Also, let them know if your pain medicine is not helping your pain. They may be able to suggest ways to help your pain.

Will I have side effects from my pain medicine?

Not everyone has side effects from pain medicine. Side effects can be treated. Some can be kept from happening in the first place. Others can even go away after a few days without being treated. Let your cancer care team know if you are having any side effects.
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 or other meds. Talk to your cancer care team about 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 cancer care 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.
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 at 1-800-227-2345. We’re here for you every step of the way.