

What to Do for Cancer Pain

Pain is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong. Only you know when you have pain and how it feels. Having cancer does not always mean that you will have pain. And if you do, things other than cancer can cause it. All pain can and should be treated. Tell your cancer care team about your pain right away. Pain is easier to treat when it first starts.



What causes pain in people with cancer?

The most common cancer-related causes of pain are:

- Tumors (growing and pushing on normal parts of the body)
- Spinal cord compression
- Bone pain
- Cancer surgery
- Phantom pain (pain that you feel in a body part that is no longer there)
- Side effects of chemotherapy and radiation
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Procedures and testing



What does cancer pain feel like?

Pain can feel different at different times. It can be in one place or in several places of your body.

People describe pain as:

- Sharp
- Dull
- Burning, throbbing, or tingling
- Muscle tightness or stiffness

Cancer pain can affect all parts of your life.

- 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” most of the time.
- You may be cranky, frustrated, sad, and even angry.



How is cancer pain treated?

There are many medicines, many ways to take the medicines, and many treatments without medicines that can help relieve your pain.

The best way to control cancer pain is to keep it from ever starting and keep it from getting worse. Work with your cancer care team to find the cancer pain treatment that works best for you.

Taking cancer pain medicines as instructed by your cancer care team can help to control pain. Here are some questions you may want to ask your cancer care team about pain medicine:

- How much medicine should I take? How often can I take it?
- If it doesn't work, can I take more? If so, how much?
- 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 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?



What else can you do to help manage cancer pain?

Along with pain medicines, you can also try non-medical methods to help ease your cancer pain. These methods include:

- Acupuncture, acupressure, and reflexology
- Cold or heat packs
- Distraction
- Emotional support and counseling
- Hypnosis
- Massage
- Relaxation techniques
- Yoga



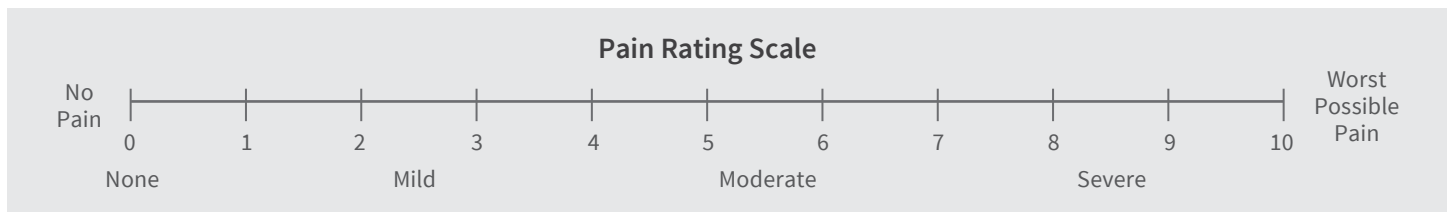
When to talk with your cancer care team

Talk with your cancer care team if the pain doesn't get better, it gets worse, or you can't get out of bed for more than 24-48 hours.



How to talk about your pain

Use a pain scale to explain how much pain you have.



Describe your pain.

Some words you might use are:

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

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



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/pain or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

