

A Quick Guide to Managing Pain



Introduction

Your comfort is our priority. There are many ways to prevent and manage symptoms effectively. Physical pain affects people in many ways. Does pain keep you from being active, sleeping well, enjoying family and friends, or even from eating? Pain can also trigger or intensify feelings like sadness, helplessness, fear, or anger. If you are in pain, please talk to your care team. Let them know how it is affecting your life and what things you hope to do when it is treated.

Remember, pain can be controlled.

Facts about Pain Treatment

Many people have questions and concerns about pain and its treatment. Here are some facts that may answer your questions

Concern: If I complain too much, I am not being a good patient.

Fact: Controlling your pain is an important part of your care. Tell your nurse or another member of your care team if you have pain, if your pain is getting worse, or if you are taking pain medicine and it is not working. They can help you get relief.

Concern: I will become “hooked on” or “addicted to” pain medicine.

Fact: When a person has pain, the body uses medication differently than if they were taking the drug to get “high”. Remember, it is important to take pain medicine regularly to keep pain under control. Studies show that getting “hooked on” or “addicted to” pain medicine is very rare.

Concern: If I take too much medicine or if I take it too early, it won’t work if my pain gets really bad.

Fact: The medicine will not stop working, but sometimes your body will get used to the medicine. This is called tolerance. Tolerance is not usually a problem with pain treatment because the amount of medicine can be changed or other medicines can be used in combination. Keeping track of how long your pain medicine works for you and telling your hospice nurse or physician will help them know if changes need to be made in your medicine or medication schedule.

Concern: The pain medicine can cause side effects. I don’t want to be drowsy or have an upset stomach.



Fact: Many pain medicines do have side effects but most of them go away after a few days when your body becomes used to the medicine. When starting a new pain medication, your physician or care team may offer advice or prescribe other medications to help prevent side effects such as nausea or constipation. It is important to let your care team know if you have any problems taking your medications.

Concern: I can only take medicine or use other treatments when I have pain.
Fact: Do not wait until pain becomes severe to take your medicine. Pain is easier to control when it is mild than when it is severe. Your doctors and nurses may suggest that you take your pain medicine routinely. This means taking it on a regular schedule around-the-clock. Preventing pain by taking your medicine on a regular schedule may even lower the amount of medicine you need each day to manage your pain. Taking your medicines on a regular schedule may also decrease the chance of having side effects from the medicines.

Pain is usually treated with medicine but other treatments can be used along with medicine to give even more pain relief. Relaxation and breathing exercises, cold packs, moist heat, and other non-medical techniques may help to control your pain. Your care team can talk with you how these other treatments might help.

The above information has been adapted from the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research Patient Guide for Managing Cancer Pain, Consumer Version Clinical Practice Guideline Number 9. The guideline was written by a panel of private-sector experts.

