

What is cancer-related pain?

Cancer pain causes you to hurt, feel uncomfortable or suffer. You may feel pain all of the time or only some of the time. Getting relief from pain is important.

Treating your pain will help you:

- Sleep and eat better
- Enjoy time with family and friends
- Do your work and hobbies

You do not have to accept pain as a normal part of living with cancer.

What can I do to manage my pain?

1. Take your pain medications as prescribed

Your doctor might prescribe more than one type of pain medication.

Types of medications may be:

- Over-the-counter medications that have acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil)
- Opioids, like codeine, morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, fentanyl and methadone
- Medications for nerve pain like pregabalin and gabapentin. These medications may take days or even weeks to start working.

Be safe when taking medication:

- Never crush or chew long-acting medications (pills or capsules). This may put too much medication into your body too fast and give you side effects. If swallowing pills is hard, ask your doctor or pharmacist about a different way to take them
- Do not stop taking your pain medication suddenly. Many of these medications need to be stopped slowly
- Ask your health care team about what to do if you miss a dose of medication
- Always check with your pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications

Side-effects of pain medication are common. Medication may cause:

- Constipation - not being able to have a bowel movement (go poo). Constipation from opioid medication will not go away on its own. A laxative needs to be taken the whole time you take opioid pain medication.
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Sleepiness or drowsiness

2. Be active & exercise

Even small, simple exercises may help your pain. Start slowly and go at your own pace.

Examples of exercise:

- Walk to the end of your driveway or up and down your hallway
- Ride an indoor bike or do gentle yoga and stretching

3. Get physical relief

Ask your health care team about other treatments before you use them, like:

- Muscle relaxants and rubs
- Using heat and/or ice on the body
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) machine

Heat and ice may not be safe if you are getting radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or if you have numbness from nerve damage. Ask your health care team.

4. Try relaxing activities

Relaxing activities and managing stress may help to control your pain.

These activities may help you relax:

- Breathing exercises
- Distraction activities like watching TV or playing computer games
- Healthy coping activities like walking outside, gardening, enjoying nature, reading or listening to music

Some patients find complementary therapies help them take control of their pain:

- Meditation
- Hypnotism
- Aromatherapy
- Yoga
- Massage
- Music therapy

5. Find support

It is normal to feel upset and frustrated when you are in pain. You can find support in your community and through your health care team.

Tips on where to find support:

- Talk to someone you trust about how your pain makes you feel
- Talk to a trained counsellor either by yourself or as part of a group
- Talk to someone at your place of worship
- Join a peer support group online or in your community