

Pain Handbook for Cancer Patients

A Guide for Management
of Pain and Side Effects



Relief of Pain Is Important

There is no benefit from suffering with pain.

Pain can actually be harmful to you.

It can:

1. Increase the strain on your heart
2. Decrease your body's ability to fight off infections and disease
3. Prevent you from being able to do the things you need to do
4. Decrease your ability to get restorative sleep
5. Cause feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. All of these things lead to a decreased quality of life.

As long as you have pain, it is important to continue treating it. Think of pain as any other health problem. For example, if you have high blood pressure and take medicine for it, your blood pressure may return to a normal range, but you must keep taking the medicine or your blood pressure will go back up.

The goal of pain treatment or management is to relieve pain or prevent it. If you have been experiencing pain all day long, you should take a long-acting pain medicine to get your pain to an acceptable level so you can comfortably do the things you need to do. Continue to take the medicine every day, as prescribed, to prevent the pain from returning or becoming out of control.

There may be times during the day when you have pain while on the long-acting medicines. This is called break-through pain. You will need other "immediate release" or short-acting medications to control this type of pain, along with your long-acting medication.

Pain usually can be well controlled with medications taken by mouth. Other ways to give medications are available if this does not work for you.

There is no recipe for pain management. Every patient is different and the medicines used to relieve pain have to be chosen specifically for each person.

Opioids (also called narcotics) are used to treat moderate to severe pain. The doctor may prescribe morphine or a morphine-like medicine.

Other medicines that help to relieve your pain may need to be added to your pain management plan. These medicines may include anti-inflammatory medications, Tylenol, steroids and medicines called adjuvants (antidepressants or anticonvulsants). The adjuvant medicines have been found to help control different types of pain.



Discussing Your Pain

Your doctors and nurses will not know how much pain you are having unless you tell them. It is your responsibility to tell the doctors and nurses about your pain, even if they don't ask. Discussing your pain is an important part of your cancer treatment.

What you need to Tell the Doctor or Nurse:

1. How bad your pain is, what it feels like and every part of your body that hurts.
2. If your pain medicine is not lasting for the whole time between doses.
3. If your pain medicine does not bring your pain down to a level that allows you to do the things that you need to do.
4. If you need to take several extra doses of the short-acting medicine each day because you are having a lot of breakthrough pain.
5. If your pain becomes worse on your present pain treatment plan or if a new pain begins.
6. How the pain is affecting your life. Does it interrupt your sleep, your ability to get around, or spending time with your family and friends?
7. If you are unable to take your medicine because it makes you feel sick, or if you cannot afford to buy your medications.

Talk with your doctor or nurse before you take any over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, Tylenol, herbal remedies or supplements. These medicines may interfere with your treatment plan.

Medicine Facts

Plan ahead to refill your prescriptions so that you will not run out. It is helpful to use the same pharmacy to fill all of your prescriptions. Do not change your pain management medication without talking with your doctor. It is your right to talk with your doctor about your needs and your treatment.



Tylenol (acetaminophen) is in many over-the-counter pain medicines and cold remedies. The maximum daily dose of Tylenol is 4000 mg per day. Please read the labels. More than 4000 mg of Tylenol is harmful to your liver.

Cancer Pain Can Be Relieved



If your doctor says that there is nothing more that can be done to relieve your pain, you may ask for a referral to a pain management specialist.

◆ *Eight Facts Everyone Should*

FEARS:

- ◆ Cancer causes severe pain that cannot be relieved.
- ◆ Patients who take pain medicine will become addicted.
- ◆ When you use pain medicine your body becomes used to its effects and pretty soon it won't work anymore.
- ◆ If you talk about pain, people will think you're a complainer.
- ◆ Talking about pain will distract your doctor from working to cure your cancer.
- ◆ It's easier to put up with pain than the side effects that come with pain medicines.
- ◆ Pain medicine will make you feel "out of it."
- ◆ If your pain is relieved, you won't know what's going on with your cancer.

d Know About Cancer Pain ♦

FACTS:

Cancer can cause pain. For some, the pain can be severe. What's important is that almost all cancer pain CAN be relieved.

Addiction is a common concern, but in fact it rarely occurs in persons with cancer who take medicines for pain control.

Pain medicines like morphine do not stop working even if they are taken for weeks, months or longer. If pain increases, the dose of medicine can be increased as much as needed or other medicines can be used.

Asking for pain relief is not "complaining." Suffering in silence can wear patients down and make them less able to take part in treatments and daily life.

Talking about pain will help the doctor provide the best care for the cancer. Pain can get in the way of sleep, rest and meaningful activities, which are all important to quality of life and to the body's ability to fight disease.

Pain medicines like morphine do cause side effects in some patients. Constipation is very common, and patients should ask their healthcare providers for advice on how to treat it. Nausea can be treated and will likely go away on its own in a few days.

Patients may feel drowsy or "out of it" for a few days after starting pain medicines like morphine. With continued, regular use of the medicine, this feeling will usually go away after a few days.

Pain is only one of the clues that tells what is going on with the cancer. Many other tests can be done.

Preventing Side Effects

Constipation is the one side effect that will not go away when taking opioid pain medication. It is important to continually prevent constipation from occurring. You can do this by:

1. Increasing your fluid intake to 6-8 glasses of non-cafeinated liquids each day. This includes water, prune juice, warm juices, non-cafeinated tea, soups and popsicles.
2. Slowly add high-fiber foods to your diet. This includes whole grain breads, bran cereals, prunes or prune juice, raw and cooked vegetables and fruits with skins and peels.
3. Increase activity; even a small increase will help.
4. Take a "Senna-containing" stool softener such as PeriColace or Senokot twice a day. Opioids slow the movement in your intestines and senna will help stimulate that movement. Senna tea can be found at health food stores.

Reporting Problems

Phone the Doctor's Office the Same Day If You Experience:

1. An inability to sleep due to pain.
2. No bowel movement for three days.
3. An inability to eat or drink because of pain or nausea.
4. New pain, change in pain, or pain that is 5 or more on a scale of 0-10 and is not relieved with your current prescribed medications.
5. Any problems getting prescriptions or taking the medicine as ordered.

Urgent Situations:

Severe pain or a severe side effect is a medical emergency, therefore, you should phone your doctor's office. If you cannot reach someone, go to the emergency room or call for an ambulance. Urgent situations include the following:

- ◆ Pain between 7-10 on a scale of 0-10 that cannot be relieved with your current medications
- ◆ Hallucinations
- ◆ New confusion, if it didn't exist before
- ◆ Difficulty waking the person up
- ◆ Vomiting without relief
- ◆ Hives along with swelling in the face or tongue
- ◆ Muscle movements that you cannot control or severe trembling

Emergency Room Visit

If You Must Go to the Emergency Room you should bring the following:

- ◆ Your doctor(s) name and phone number
- ◆ Entire medication list
- ◆ All the pain medications that have been prescribed

What the Emergency Room Doctor Needs to Know:

- ◆ What you have taken for pain so far today
- ◆ When the unrelieved pain or unrelieved side effect started and how long it has been a problem
- ◆ Where the pain is and how severe it is

Helpful Web Sites

American Alliance of Cancer Pain Initiatives
www.aacpi.wisc.edu

American Pain Foundation
www.painfoundation.org

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

CancerCare
Free Services for anyone affected by cancer
www.cancercares.org

About This Booklet

Information in this handbook was compiled by Leslie Aalund, RN, C, Pain Management Coordinator at SwedishAmerican Hospital, **(815) 489-4688**

Information about cancer pain fears and facts on pages 5 & 6 are based in part on the Barriers Questionnaire-II, Gunnarsdottir S, Donovan HS, Serlin RC, Voge C, Ward S (2002). First Edition published by the Wisconsin Cancer Pain Initiative, 1996 Second Edition, American Alliance of Cancer Pain Initiatives (AACPI), 2004 Copyright University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, 2004. Reproduced with permission.