

# PAIN

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People with cancer may feel pain in a specific area of the body, or they may not feel well overall. The feeling of pain can be made worse if a person is depressed.

Some people with cancer may have difficulty discussing their pain because of the way they were brought up, the way people in the family usually express themselves, or just because that's the way they are. In general, the way a person talked about pain in the past, before the illness, is the way he or she will talk about it now.

Combinations of medicines that can be taken by mouth can control even severe pain very well. These combinations usually include opioids. People with cancer who have never abused drugs and are placed on opioids for pain relief rarely become addicted or use the drugs for pleasure. Their bodies may, after a time, become tolerant of the pain medicine and doses may need to be increased to get the same pain relief.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Pain that goes away with medication, but then returns before the next scheduled dose is taken, or pain that never goes away may indicate a need for a change in medication or dosage.
- Signs of depression, such as difficulty sleeping or lack of interest in things you used to enjoy.
- Worry about things that had not caused concern in the past.
- New areas of pain or a change in pain.

## WHAT TO DO

- Make sure you take the pain medication exactly as prescribed, even if the pain is not severe at the time of the scheduled dose. Pain medication should be

given around the clock on a schedule rather than only when the pain is severe.

- Check with your doctor if you think your pain medication schedule needs to be changed.
- Keep at least a one-week supply of pain medication on hand.
- Be as active as the pain allows. Talk to your doctor or nurse if pain is interfering with activities.
- Ask the doctor for medication to control nausea if you experience this side effect.
- Ask your doctor about a laxative regimen, as pain medications can cause constipation.
- Rate your pain using a pain rating scale, with 0 equaling no pain and 10 indicating the most severe pain. This will help you describe your pain to others.

## DO NOT

- Do not suddenly stop taking all pain medicine; instead, ask your doctor or nurse about reducing the medication gradually.

## CALL YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS:

- New, severe pain
- Inability to take anything by mouth, including the pain medication
- Lack of pain reliever "breakthrough" pain that returns between scheduled doses of pain medication
- Constipation
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Pain accompanied by a new symptom, such as the inability to walk, eat or urinate