

Some people experience pain as a symptom of their cancer or as a side effect of their treatment. Some people do not have any pain and no two people ever feel pain in the same way. If you have pain, please tell a member of your health care team because help is available.

Pain can almost always be reduced or relieved with medicines (e.g., acetaminophen, narcotics), radiation therapy, or other methods of pain control. Treating pain is specific to each person and your medicine may need to be adjusted over time. To control your pain, you must take your medicines on a regular schedule, instead of waiting for the pain to occur.

“Breakthrough pain” is pain that occurs before your next scheduled dose of medicine. If you have breakthrough pain, tell your doctor so your dose or drug can be changed to help you better control this pain.

Ask a member of your health care team for the medication information sheet on the medicines you will be taking.

Can I get addicted to narcotic pain medicines?

Addiction is very unlikely to occur when these drugs are taken as prescribed by your doctor to control your pain. Please talk about your concerns with a member of your health care team.

What side effects can I expect from these medicines?

Drowsiness, nausea and vomiting, and constipation are common side effects that may occur while taking pain medication such as morphine or hydromorphone.

Drowsiness should not last more than a few days while your body adjusts to the medicine. If drowsiness continues you may need to be changed to a different pain medication.

Nausea, vomiting or upset stomach may occur while you are taking the medicine. This will usually lessen as your body adjusts to the medicine. Your doctor may prescribe another medicine to treat the nausea and vomiting if it bothers you or lasts more than a few days.

Constipation is a common side effect and is easily managed with a stool softener or laxative. To prevent constipation take the stool softeners/laxatives as soon as you begin the narcotic pain medicines.

If I take narcotic pain medicines now, will they work later if my pain gets worse?

Yes. If your pain increases over time, you may need a larger dose. Your doctor may prescribe a larger dose of the same medicine or change you to a different medicine.

How will I know if I still need to take the medicine for pain?

Once your pain is under control, and you start to feel drowsy (sleepy), you may need to decrease the pain medicine. **Never decrease or stop your pain medicine without talking to a member of your health care team.**

Can radiation therapy be used to control pain?

Radiation therapy is another useful method of treating cancer pain. Sometimes radiation therapy may cause **temporary** increased pain and/or swelling in the treated area and may take up to three weeks to be effective. Your pain medicine may need to be increased or changed, if your pain is not controlled. If the radiation therapy controls your pain, you may be able to decrease your pain medicine.

Are there any other things that can be done to help control pain?

Surgery, chemotherapy and hormone therapy can also be used to control pain.

Some people have found breathing and relaxation techniques, imagery, massage or distraction helpful. The Patient and Family Library at the London Regional Cancer Program has books, videos and CDs that may help you get started.

Tell your health care team if you have:

- Pain that does not lessen with treatment;
- Pain that changes, increases or “breaks through” before the next dose is due;
- Constipation, confusion, nausea or drowsiness;
- Trouble swallowing pain medicines or other problems taking your medicine;
- Feelings of depression;
- Trouble sleeping;
- Any new symptoms such as trouble walking, urinating, numbness or tingling sensation.

It is well known that uncontrolled pain can affect your ability to work, participate in family activities, sleep and may lead to feelings of hopelessness. Your pain **can** be well controlled when you work closely with your health care team.

For more information, please talk to a member of your healthcare team.

You do not have to live with pain.