

For many people, one of the scariest parts of cancer may be fear of experiencing pain. For caregivers, the thought of your loved one being in pain is a very real concern. And yet, pain can be treated and managed in a way that is very tolerable. Admitting that you are in pain is not a sign of weakness—caregivers can help their loved one with this challenge. In order to better manage pain and discomfort, it is helpful to know how to communicate about pain and how to effectively take control of pain and discomfort. Caregivers may have to be the voice of the patient at times if they are unwilling or unable to share their distress. Talk to your loved one's health care team about any pain or discomfort your loved one is experiencing.



[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)  
1-888-793-9355



## WHAT CAUSES PAIN IN PEOPLE WITH CANCER?

Tumors can cause pain when they press on a nerve, invade bones, or press on a body organ. Medical tests for cancer or the treatment for cancer such as surgery might also cause pain and discomfort. Generally this type of pain is very short-term and can be treated well with pain medicines. Pain or discomfort as a result of longer-term side effects from cancer and its treatment may require more careful pain management over time. If your loved one has more challenging issues related to managing pain, there are doctors who specialize in pain management that can work with them. No matter what is causing pain or discomfort, you and your loved one can work closely with their health care team to find a good treatment plan.

## HOW SHOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PAIN?

You will find that the health care team will ask your loved one (and you) on a regular basis to describe and rate their pain. By talking about pain, you both begin the process of controlling it. In between appointments, recording details about their pain and other symptoms in a notebook or journal can be very helpful. Some of the important characteristics of their pain to discuss with their doctor are:

- **Severity.** How bad is the pain on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being “no pain” and 10 being “the worst pain you can imagine?”
- **Location.** Where is the pain? Is it in more than one place?
- **Frequency and Duration.** When do you have pain? Is the pain always there or does it come and go? How long does it last? Is it better or worse at different times of the day or night?

- **Quality.** Describe the pain. Is it burning or stabbing? Sharp or dull? Cramping?
- **Change.** What makes it better (medication, a heating pad) or worse (moving, coughing)?

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR CONTROLLING PAIN

- Be honest with the health care team about your loved one's pain. They want to help you manage pain in the best way possible. There is no need for your loved one to feel like they need to endure the pain with no relief.
- Note how much medication they are taking and the time they take it.
- Do NOT let them wait until the pain is unbearable to take their pain medication. It is easier to prevent pain, or relieve it when it starts, than it is to treat pain once it becomes severe.
- In addition to medication, relaxation exercises and pacing activities appropriately can be a helpful part of pain control. Ask the health care team for a referral to a psychologist or counselor who specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy for pain management to learn more about these strategies.

## USE OF PAIN MEDICATIONS

Some people with cancer are fearful of getting addicted to pain medicines or worry that pain medicines won't work later if they use them early on. These are both myths. The right amount of pain medicine is the amount that controls most or all of the pain, most or all of the time. If you are concerned about pain management or worry that your loved one may have problems with pain or taking pain medications, please talk openly and directly with the health care team. Together you can find the best approach to ensure that pain is managed well, and that your loved one can maintain a good quality of life.

# General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

**Cancer Support Community** • 888-793-9355 • [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org)

**American Cancer Society** • 800-227-2345 • [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**CancerCare** • 800-813-4673 • [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

**Cancer.net** • 888-651-3038 • [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Caregiver Action Network** • 855-227-3640 • [www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

**Healthcare.gov** • [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

**Livestrong Foundation** • 866-673-7205 • [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

**National Cancer Institute** • 800-422-6237 • [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine** • 888-644-6226 • [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

**Patient Advocate Foundation** • 800-532-5274 • [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

## Cancer Support Community Resources

**Cancer Support Community's** (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org) for more info.

**Cancer Support Helpline**® — Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon–Fri, 9 am–9 pm ET.

**Open to Options**® — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

**Frankly Speaking About Cancer**® — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FranklySpeakingAboutCancer).

**Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs** — With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation).

**MyLifeLine** — CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Connect with other caregivers by joining the Caregiver Support online discussion board. Sign up at [www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org).

**Grassroots Network** — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at [www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate).

**Cancer Experience Registry**® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at [www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org).

The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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