

For many people, the scariest part of a cancer diagnosis is the fear of experiencing pain. Pain is an experience faced by some people with cancer, but it can be treated and managed in a way that is very tolerable for most. Admitting that you are in pain is not a sign of weakness. 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 before you become distressed. Talk to your health care team about any discomfort you are experiencing.



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 (biopsies), or the actual treatment for cancer might also cause pain and discomfort. For example, inflammation of the mucous membranes anywhere in the body caused by certain kinds of chemotherapy or by radiation can be very painful. Or if a nerve is damaged during treatment, it may cause burning or shooting pain. Not all pain you experience will be directly associated to your cancer or your treatment.

HOW SHOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PAIN?

You are the expert, so the health care team will ask you to describe and rate your pain. By talking about pain, you begin the process of controlling it. Recording details in your journal can be very helpful. Some of the important characteristics of your pain to discuss 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

- ✓ Do not ignore pain. Track your pain, using a scale of 0-10 to rate it, then report it back to your health care team.
- ✓ Pain can be managed with prescription or non-prescription drugs, surgery, or nerve blocks.
- ✓ Do NOT wait until the pain is out of control to take your medication. It is easier to stop pain before it starts or prevent it from getting worse.
- ✓ Tell your doctor or nurse if your pain is worsening, if you develop side effects from pain medication, or if you experience bowel or bladder problems.
- ✓ Write down how much medication you are taking and the times you take it.
- ✓ Tell your doctor and nurse about all the prescriptions and over-the-counter medications you are using. This will help reduce the likelihood of a potentially dangerous drug interaction.
- ✓ For some people, complementary therapy for pain may be effective. Mind-body practices such as acupuncture, breathing exercises, meditation, hypnosis, Tai Chi, or yoga may provide relief from pain.
- ✓ Physical or occupational therapy, massage, and the use of hot or cold compresses can also help to relieve pain.
- ✓ If pain remains a problem, ask for a referral to a pain specialist.

USE OF PAIN MEDICATIONS

Many find it helps to have two different pain medicines; one that is long-acting ensuring that there is some pain medicine in the body at all times, and the other short-acting for when you need an extra boost. Many 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. With regular communication with your healthcare team about your pain, your pain medication can be adjusted accordingly. To learn more about pain medication and managing pain, visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/pain-neuropathy.

General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

Cancer Support Community • 888-793-9355 • www.CancerSupportCommunity.org

American Cancer Society • 800-227-2345 • www.cancer.org

CancerCare • 800-813-4673 • www.cancercare.org

Cancer.net • 888-651-3038 • www.cancer.net

Caregiver Action Network • 855-227-3640 • www.caregiveraction.org

Healthcare.gov • www.healthcare.gov

Livestrong Foundation • 866-673-7205 • www.livestrong.org

National Cancer Institute • 800-422-6237 • www.cancer.gov

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine • 888-644-6226 • www.nccam.nih.gov

Patient Advocate Foundation • 800-532-5274 • www.patientadvocate.org

CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Cancer Support Community's (CSC) resources and programs are available free of charge. Call 888-793-9355 or visit 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.

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.

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.

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.

Cancer Experience Registry[®]—Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at 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.

© April 2020. Cancer Support Community. All rights reserved.