

How to Manage your Pain

What is cancer-related pain?

Cancer pain causes you to hurt, feel uncomfortable or suffer. You may feel pain all of the time or only some of the time. Everyone who has cancer pain will feel it differently. Only you know how much pain you feel and how it affects you. You do not have to accept pain as a normal part of living with cancer.

What causes cancer-related pain?

- Cancer tumour or symptom
- Cancer treatment
- Medical procedures and tests
- Other symptoms like constipation and nausea
- Other health factors
- Emotional, social, and spiritual impact of cancer
- Medication
- Stress and anxiety



What can I do to manage my pain?

Take your pain medications as prescribed

Your doctor might prescribe more than one type of pain medication. The types of medications may be:

- Over-the-counter medications that have acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil).
- Opioids, like codeine, morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, fentanyl, and methadone.
- Medications for nerve pain like pregabalin and gabapentin. *Note: these medications may take days or even weeks to start working.*
- Take your medication on schedule, even if you do not feel pain at the moment.

Keep your mouth clean

Keep your teeth, gums, and mouth as clean as you can while you are getting cancer treatments. You should brush and floss your teeth often to avoid infections. Ask your health care team about medicines that can numb your mouth to make it more comfortable.

Be active and exercise

Small, simple exercises may help your pain. Try walking to the end of your driveway or up and down your hallway. Start slowly and go at your own pace. Talk to your health care team about your activities and make a plan to keep doing them.

Find support

- Talk to someone you trust about how your pain makes you feel.
- Talk to a trained counsellor either by yourself or as part of a group.
- Talk to someone at your place of worship.
- Join a peer support group online or in your community.
- Join a chronic pain self-management group.

Get physical relief

Ask your health care team about other treatments like muscle relaxants and rubs, heat or ice on the body, or the transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) machine. If you want to try complementary therapies, ask about your provider's safety standards. Some therapists need a license to do their work. Be especially careful when doing things that use needles, like acupuncture.

Keep track of your pain

A pain diary can help you write down information about your pain. This will help you and your health care team know how your pain changes over time and what things make it better or worse. The American Cancer Society has a tool that you can use to track you pain. This tool can be found on the American Cancer Society's website.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Pain that is not going away or is getting worse
- A new pain that you have not had before
- Pain when you take a deep breath
- Sudden leg weakness, especially if you have back pain



For more information, talk to your health care team or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms



South West
Regional Cancer Program
in partnership with Cancer Care Ontario



London Health Sciences Cen
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Information adapted from Cancer Care Ontario's How to Manage Your Symptoms - patient guides.

This is information only and does not replace medical advice. Always ask your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.