

# Opening the Door to Effective Pain Management: *Getting the Facts and Getting Help*

Cancer-related pain can be physically and emotionally exhausting, but there are many ways to manage this side effect. The first step is to tell your doctor or nurse how you feel. He or she may ask you to rate your pain – for example, on a scale of zero to 10, in which zero equals no pain, and 10 is the worst pain possible. Rating your pain helps your health care team get a better sense of how you feel so they can select the best way to provide you with relief.

Here are some helpful hints for managing cancer-related pain:

**Recognize pain as a message that your body needs help.** Pain medicines and pain-relieving techniques are available to give you relief and improve your quality of life during treatment.

**Talk to your health care team about your pain.** Assessing pain and treating it are just as important as checking your blood pressure or listening to your heartbeat. Pain needs to be reassessed at each medical appointment.

**Bring a family member or friend to medical appointments.** He or she may remember details about your pain that you have forgotten. This will help your doctors have a more accurate picture of your pain.

**Keep a “pain journal.”** Keeping a journal gives you a record of how your pain medication is working, any side effects you are experiencing, and your emotions throughout the day.

*Some of the things you may want to write down include:*

- Where and when the pain occurs
- How often and how quickly the pain arises
- How long the pain lasts
- What makes the pain worse
- Whether anything, such as heat, ice or medicine, eases the pain
- How long your pain-relieving technique works and how much relief it provides
- Any side effects you experience when taking pain medication
- How the pain is affecting your quality of life – for example, is it keeping you from sleeping, eating, walking, working or exercising?



**Explore non-medical pain management techniques.** These can include such practices as meditation, yoga, guided imagery, and relaxation exercises. Some cancer centers have programs to teach patients the basics of these techniques. There are also a number of “how-to” books and recordings available in stores and through online booksellers.

**If a pain medication is not working, let your doctor know.** He or she may increase the dosage or frequency of your medication, or try a new medication or pain-relieving technique.

**Don't be alarmed if your doctor increases the dosage of your pain medicine.** At times, the amount of pain medicine your body needs may increase. This can happen because the amount of your pain has increased, or because your body has built up a tolerance to the medication. Tolerance means that your body is no longer responding to the drug. Experiencing tolerance does not mean that you are addicted to your pain medication. Your pain medication is a medical treatment. Needing it for pain-relief is not the same as having an emotional dependence on the drug.

**Remember that you are the expert on your pain, and your health care team is there to help you manage it.** With so many advances in the field of pain management, there is no need for anyone to be in constant pain. Effective pain management improves your quality of life and is a basic human right. So get involved in your care, and be an active participant with your doctor in managing your pain.



### **CancerCare Can Help**

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers are available to help you cope with cancer and treatment side effects. We provide individual counseling and support groups by telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, financial assistance, and referrals to other resources. To learn more about how we help, call us at **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit **[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)**.



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**National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001**  
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