

# Tips for Managing Pain

## Things you can do on your own



### Talk about your pain with your care team:

- One of the most important things you can do is to talk with your care team about your pain. This will help the team find the cause of your pain, and thus help guide you to find ways to improve control of it.
- Write down information about your pain so you can share it with your care team. Keep track of:
  - Where your pain is located
  - What your pain feels like (sharp, dull, throbbing, aching, burning, shooting, etc.)
  - How bad your pain is on a scale from 1-10
  - When your pain happens and how long it lasts
  - What makes your pain better or worse
  - What activities your pain interferes with (walking, eating, sleeping, etc.)
  - What medications help the pain, and how well they work
    - Write down your pain on a scale of 1-10 before taking a medication. Take the medication and wait an hour. Write down your pain level on a scale of 1-10 again. Share this information with your care team.

### Ask your care team if physical therapy might help:

- Sometimes people are afraid to move because of their pain. This fear and inactivity can make pain worse. A physical therapist may help you find safe ways to move, and can help find the right exercise plan for you.

### Consider complementary therapies:

- Complementary therapies are used alongside your medical treatments. They may help to lessen the side effects of cancer or treatment. Below are some of the therapies that can help with pain.
  - Acupuncture – a treatment that uses needles to reduce pain
  - Reiki – a type of massage that involves healing touch
  - Tai chi – a form of light exercise focused on slow movements and deep breathing

## Things you can do on your own (continued)

- Qigong – an exercise that involved mediation and controlled breathing
- Yoga – an exercise that involves specific body postures to promote health and relaxation
- Many relaxation exercises can be helpful for pain. Here are some different kinds:
  - Mindful awareness: try to notice the colors of objects around you, focus on smells and tastes, listen to sounds of nature or general sounds in your environment.
  - Breathing and muscle tensing: try breathing in and tensing your muscles for 5-10 seconds, then breathing out while letting your muscles go for another 5-10 seconds. Try doing a separate body part one at a time. For example, start by tensing your hand by making a fist, move on to your biceps, shoulders, stomach, legs, feet, and eyebrows, making sure to relax each part after tensing. This is also called Progressive Muscle Relaxation.
  - Slow rhythmic breathing: try taking a slow deep breath in for 3 seconds and a slow deep breath out for 3 seconds. Repeat 3 times. As it gets easier, you can increase to 4 or 5 second intervals for each breath in and each breath out. Sometimes focusing on a repetitive phrase in your mind, an object in front of you, or just noticing your own breathing can help get your mind off your pain.

### **Other remedies that may help:**

- Try putting hot or cold packs on the area with pain
- Do things to take your mind off pain, like watching TV (avoid stressful shows/movies), reading, listening to music, or engaging in a hobby or activity you enjoy. You may need to modify the hobby to fit your current abilities.

See the Other Resources page for more information

## With over-the-counter medications



The over-the-counter pain medications listed below may help with **mild to moderate pain**. You can buy these medications at your local pharmacy. The generic or store brands are fine. Take them as directed on the package, unless you have been told they are not safe for you.

- Acetaminophen, which you may know as Tylenol®
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen (which you may know as Advil® or Motrin®), and aspirin

For the most effective pain relief, you may alternate ibuprofen and acetaminophen as described below.

- Rotate these medicines so that you're taking one or the other every 3 hours
- For example, if you take ibuprofen at 12PM and 6PM, take acetaminophen at 3PM and 9PM
- Always take the least amount of medication necessary to control your pain
- Alternating these medicines may provide enough pain relief so you do not need to take an opiate
- If you have ulcers, or kidney or bleeding problems, your care team may ask you to limit ibuprofen
- If you have liver problems, your care team may ask you to limit acetaminophen
- These medications do *not* make you sleepy and do *not* cause constipation

See the Other Resources page for more information

**REMINDER - Always keep your care team updated about over the counter medicines you are taking. If your care team tells you they are not safe for you, do not take them.**

## With the help of your care team



- Your care team might suggest **opioids** which are very effective for **moderate to severe pain**. Talk to your care team about which one may be best for you.
- Opioids cause drowsiness: avoid driving or activities that require you to be alert while taking
- Opioids cause constipation: most people need to take laxatives or stool softeners along with opiates
- Opiates that provide relief within 30 minutes and last for a few hours are called short-acting.
- Long-acting opiates can control pain for 8-12 hours, but may not help acute pain.
- Safe use of opiates: opiates are highly effective for treating pain, however, used improperly they can be addictive. Talk to your team about how to use them safely.
- Always write down the doses of opiates you take and your levels of pain. Bring this information to your appointments.

Short-acting opiates include drugs like:

- Morphine Immediate Release
- Oxycodone
- Codeine
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)

Long-acting opiates include drugs like:

- OxyContin®
- MSContin®
- Fentanyl patches
- Methadone

## When to call your care team for help



- If your pain gets worse
- If the pain is new or sudden
- If you are not sure how to take your medications

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## Additional information on Pain



- [Click here](#) for guided meditations promoting inner peace
- [Click here](#) for a 15-minute guided imagery meditation exercise
- [Click here](#) to learn more about non-medical treatments for pain
- [Click here](#) for tips on managing cancer pain at home
- [Click here](#) for more information on managing cancer pain

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