



**This Information Sheet gives information about cancer pain. There is a wide variety of safe, effective options for controlling pain. If pain is not well-managed, it can affect your ability to work, to enjoy normal activity and to relate to family and friends.**

## **What is pain and how should you deal with it?**

Pain is an uncomfortable and unpleasant sensation and emotional experience that occurs when tissues in the body are damaged. You could experience pain for only a short period or you could have chronic pain which could impact on your quality of life. Either way it should be treated.

## **It is important to recognise that pain does not always occur with cancer.**

If pain is present it could be caused by many factors. Pain can be a side effect of treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation treatment, surgery or a medical procedure. Pain can occur because of a tumour pressing on bone, nerves or body organs. Infection can cause pain. Pain can develop from conditions unrelated to cancer, such as headaches, arthritis and muscle strain.

## **Let your doctor or nurse know about your pain as soon as it occurs.**

Early treatment is always more effective. You can take the following steps as an active participant in your health care:

- Do not wait to be asked about pain. The earlier you let your doctor know about it, the easier it is to treat. You are the expert – only you know how you are feeling.
- Using descriptive words to describe your pain is helpful for your doctor, for example, sharp, shooting pain, aching, gnawing, or burning.
- If possible, take a friend or family member to appointments.
- Try rating your pain from 1 to 10.
- Does anything make your pain better or worse, for example, changing position, using a hot-water bottle or ice pack?
- Does pain keep you awake?

Keep a diary of your pain – when it begins, when it peaks, when you take medications, how much these help, and what you were doing at the time the pain occurred.

- If your doctor prescribes pain medication, give the doctor or nurse feedback on whether it works.
- Take your medication exactly as prescribed.
- Watch out for side effects and report them to your doctor or nurse.
- Common side effects include constipation, nausea and drowsiness. All of these can be managed if the doctor or nurse know about them.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are feeling anxious or depressed. Relieving anxiety and depression is an important part of controlling pain. This may be done effectively by talking with family, friends, your health care team, or a counsellor. Sometimes medication may be prescribed to relieve anxiety and depression.

- For some types of pain, nerve-blocks and radiation treatment can be effective.
- Complementary therapies, such as massage or relaxation techniques may relieve pain.
- Specialized equipment, such as mattresses, a V-pillow, a sheepskin, a cushion or bed cradles can be helpful if you are spending a lot of time sitting or lying. Ask your nurse for advice.
- Know how to reach your doctor or nurse after hours.

## Don't believe these myths about pain medication.

- Pain medication is addictive. FALSE.

People do not get high from pain medication and it is not addictive.

- Pain medication will stop working if you use it for a long period of time. FALSE.

If tolerance develops, your doctor can safely increase your dosage, prescribe a different drug, or use a combination of drugs.

- If medication does not work right away, it will not work at all. FALSE.

Everyone responds differently to different drugs, and it may take time to find the right combination.

- Living with pain is a sign of strength. FALSE.

If your pain is under control you will feel better.

**KEEP ALL MEDICATION OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN AND OUT OF SIGHT.**

## Useful websites

Cancer Backup UK:

<http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk/ResourceSupport/Symptomsideeffects/Pain>