

Pain

This information in the 'Helpful hints' series is intended only as a guide, to help you deal with your pain until you can talk to your doctor. It is not intended to replace medical advice.

What do you need to know about cancer pain?

Many people believe that, if you have cancer you will inevitably have pain and nothing can be done to relieve it. Both beliefs are completely unfounded; in fact a third of people with cancer will not experience any pain and, for those who do, the great majority of cases can be completely controlled.

The following is designed to help and encourage you to seek the help and expertise that is available to you. The following information will be useful to your doctor when looking at ways to help you with your pain:

- **Site of the pain:** Where in your body do you feel the pain and does it seem to start in one place and then spread or move to another area?
- **Type of pain:** What does the pain feel like? For example is it dull or aching, quick or sharp, shooting, hot or cold, 'electrical like', constant or coming and going in waves?
- **Duration:** How long does it last, a few seconds or an hour or more, continuously? At what time of day or night does it come? Does it wake you or stop you from getting to sleep?
- **Things that make the pain worse:** Have you noticed things you do that either cause the pain, or make it worse? Activities such as bending over, lifting things, moving around, breathing in, coughing, eating meals and so on.
- **Things that make the pain better:** Does anything you do reduce or relieve the pain such as resting, changing position, avoiding certain movements, rubbing the area or eating small meals? Have any painkillers you have tried made the pain better? If so, how long did they relieve your pain?

Who can help?

Your GP (family doctor), the consultant and the team of specialist doctors and nurses will be key people in helping with pain relief.

Other services may also be involved such as nursing, psychology, social work, counselling, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and health professionals specialising in pain management. Complementary therapies may also help; ask your doctor to advise you.

How can I help myself?

One of the main reasons pain relief is not as effective as it might be, is the difficulty some people have in continuing with the prescribed treatment. A common mistake people make is to stop the painkillers when the pain is relieved; treatments for pain need to be taken regularly, in the way your doctor directs.

Many patients worry about what causes their pain. This may make them ignore the pain fearing that their illness is getting worse. This is not true in most situations, but leads people to experience unnecessary pain, because a doctor or health professional was not made aware of the problem.

What about the side-effects of painkillers?

People are often worried about the side-effects of painkillers such as nausea or constipation. There are ways of dealing with these effects so don't be afraid to take the pain control and don't stop taking the treatment, but do talk to the team treating you about these concerns.

When should I seek professional advice?

If your pain increases or changes in a way that you find difficult to manage, seek advice as soon as it happens. The chances are it can be dealt with quickly before it becomes too uncomfortable.

If, for whatever reason, the treatment you have been prescribed is now difficult to continue with, please feel free to ask for advice. It is very likely that the treatment can be given in an alternative way or an equivalent but more suitable treatment can be found. Please talk to the team treating you if you are concerned about your symptoms.