



the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West

Pain Management

Pain can range from mild to severe. Pain is very individual and each person may tolerate pain differently. There are different causes of pain in cancer patients. It can be caused directly by the tumor, such as metastasis to the bone, or indirectly, such as by pressure on a nerve. It can also be caused by side effects from treatment, such as radiation, chemotherapy, or surgery.

Pain control is very important in the overall care of cancer patients. Uncontrolled pain often causes fear, anxiety, anger, or temporary confusion. It can cause loss of appetite (leading to weight loss and possibly poor nutrition), increase the risk of depression and/or cause patients to limit their movement which can lead to weakness, loss of muscle mass and a decline in the overall general well-being.

Patients and health care providers need to work together to manage pain. Patients need to let their healthcare provider know if they are having pain and are having any side effects from their pain medicines; you may be asked to rate your pain on a scale of one to ten. Just as there are different causes of pain, there are also different ways to treat pain. In addition to medications, other types of treatments can be used such as radiation, nerve blocks, and electrical-stimulating devices (TENS units). There are different classes of pain medications as well.

Your provider may suggest a combination of drugs and/or other interventions to reach the best possible pain control.

Types of pain medicines

Non-narcotic pain medicines

Examples: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Ibuprofen) and Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
Side Effects: Stomach upset or ulceration, bleeding, & kidney or liver toxicity

These medicines are found over the counter, taken by mouth, or as a suppository, and are generally well tolerated. If you have sensitivity to aspirin, you should avoid Ibuprofen. If you have kidney or liver problems, talk to your healthcare provider before starting these medicines.

Narcotic or Opioid Pain Medicines

Examples: Oxycodone/Oxycontin, Morphine, MS Contin, Hydrocodone, Fentanyl, Tramadol, Nucynta
Side Effects: Constipation, dry mouth, low blood pressure, nausea/vomiting & tiredness

These are for moderate to severe cancer pain. These medicines come in pills, liquid, patches or lozenges. These medicines come in a short acting form and a long acting form. They require a written prescription from your healthcare provider.

The short acting medicines may be taken every few hours on an "as needed" basis. These medicines can be taken around the clock to keep your pain under control. Short acting pain medicine takes about 30 minutes to work. This can help you better plan your activities and control your pain. For example, take your short acting pain medicine 30 minutes before any activity that causes you pain.

Long acting pain medicine is usually taken twice a day. If a transdermal patch is prescribed, a new patch replaces the old patch every 72 hours. Sometimes you may have breakthrough pain in-between the doses of your long acting medicine. You would take your short acting pain medicine during this time.

Always follow the instructions on your pain medicine prescription or from your healthcare provider when taking the pain medicines.

Other Pain Medicines

Examples: Anti-depressants (Elavil), Anti-convulsants (Lyrica, Neurontin), Steroids, Lidoderm patches

Side Effects: Constipation, fluid retention (causing swelling), dizziness/drowsiness, hives, rash, dry mouth, nausea, headache and/or blurred vision, & increased blood sugar.

Medications that are used to treat other illnesses may be used to help treat your pain. For example, medicines for depression and for seizures can help relax your muscles and help treat tingling and burning.

Inflammation plays a key role in pain. Steroids help decrease inflammation and are able to better control pain. Steroids can be taken orally, or may be given as a shot to a local area of pain.

Lidoderm patches that numb the area they are applied to can be applied to the skin every 12 hours as needed to manage nerve pain.

Managing Side Effects

To prevent nausea and/or vomiting

- Eat a small snack a few minutes before you take the pain medicine.
- Take nausea medicine with the pain medicine.

To prevent constipation

- Take a stool softener (such as Colace) everyday when taking any type of narcotic.
- Drink 6-8 glasses of fluid per day.
- Increase physical activity.
- Eat foods high in fiber, such as bran cereal, whole grain breads.
- If there has been no bowel movement in 2 days, start taking a laxative.

When to contact your healthcare provider

- If your pain is not well controlled.
- If there is change in mental status or confusion occurs with taking pain medicine.
- If you are unable to move your bowels after using OTC medications for 2 days.

For more information feel free to visit the website chemocare.com