

Cancer & Pain

When undergoing cancer treatment you may experience physical pain. Pain can be caused by the disease itself or by treatments and is common in people with cancer. Pain can be acute (starts suddenly, usually is intense and typically improves fairly quickly when pain relief is given) or chronic, meaning it lasts over time. Having pain can greatly impact a person's life and usually makes it difficult to do the things you want to do including: sleeping, moving around/exercising, working/completing tasks or playing with children. When in pain, it is common to feel frustrated, irritable, worried or sad.

- It is also common to feel like the pain is in control of your body and life, not you.
- Pain medications can be prescribed by your medical provider to control pain and may be helpful. In addition, there are many non-medication ways to manage pain that **help you take back control**.

Ways to Manage Pain & Improve Your Quality of Life:

- **Breathing and relaxation exercises:** These methods relax your body & focus your attention on performing a specific task, instead of concentrating on the pain. Here are the steps of a deep breathing exercise:
 - Sit in a comfortable position in a chair with both feet on the ground.
 - Put one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
 - Slowly breathe through your nose counting to 3 or 4. If you would like, close your eyes.
 - The hand on your stomach should begin to rise & the hand on your chest should stay pretty still. (If this doesn't happen at first that is okay). Imagine there is a balloon inside your stomach and each time you inhale, you are filling the balloon with air.
 - Slowly exhale through your mouth, counting to 3 or 4, pushing all of the air out & deflating the balloon.
 - As you slowly continue to inhale & exhale, you may find your body feeling heavier and warmer as it begins to relax.
 - Practice this exercise for a few minutes each day.
 - **If you become dizzy, take smaller breaths (only count to 1 or 2).*
- **Distraction:** A method used to divert your attention to a more pleasant event, object or situation. Is there a funny movie you can watch? A game to play? Or someone you can talk to about things *other than* cancer or pain? Distraction may not help for long periods of time, but some people find that distraction can help their pain in the short-term and provide relief.
- **Heat or cold:** Try using temperature to relieve pain. Examples are: ice packs, heating pads or taking a hot bath.
- **Imagery:** Using soothing, positive mental images that help you to relax. Take a moment to think about a calming place where you feel rested and at peace. It could be at the beach, near a lake, in a meadow, hiking in the mountains, or simply your favorite room or chair at home. Once you have picked a relaxing place, close your eyes and imagine yourself there. Practice using all of your senses: What do you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell?

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- **Massage, pressure and vibration:** Physical stimulation of muscles or nerves can facilitate relaxation and relieve painful muscle spasms or contractions. Many stores sell hand held massaging devices. If someone is available, you can also ask a friend or family member to gently massage your back, shoulders or feet. Or you can try gently massaging different areas of your body (e.g., legs, arms) with a tennis ball or rolling pin from the kitchen if you don't have a massaging device.
 - *If you are unsure if it is medically safe to have a massage or participate in another pain management strategy, please ask your medical provider.
- **Noticing what you are telling yourself:** When in pain, it's easy to completely focus on the pain and tell yourself, over and over again, things like, "This is so painful!" "I can't do this!" "It's too hard to feel this way!" While all these thoughts may be true at times, they can lead to feeling down and frustrated. If you notice these types of thoughts, try to change them to be more balanced by thinking something like, "Even though I am hurting today, I am doing what I can to feel better."
- **Thinking about what is important to you:** Pain can be very tiring and if you are in pain, especially for a long time, it can be difficult to stay motivated. To help ease feelings of frustration and increase motivation, it can be useful to think about what is most important to you in life. Some questions to consider are: What keeps you moving forward? What do you value? What are your main goals & priorities? What gives your life purpose? *Remember, each day that you choose to get out of bed, you are making an active choice to engage in life and do what you can, even though you are in pain.*