

## Pain

### Fact sheet

Pain is a sign of illness or injury. Acute pain is an essential part of your body's defences but when it becomes chronic pain it can interfere with your enjoyment of life and relationships, and your ability to do everyday things like showering, eating, and sleeping.

Most pain can be well controlled with the right treatment: you don't have to 'grin and bear it'.

The earlier you get treatment for pain, the easier it is to get under control. You need less medication overall and when your pain is controlled you are able to concentrate on the things that are important to you.

The best results in controlling pain are achieved when you talk to your family, carers and health professionals about your pain, and work together to find the best solutions.

### What causes pain?

When there is damage to any part of your body, your nervous system sends a message along nerves to your brain. When your brain receives these messages, you feel pain.

There are different types of pain depending on what is causing it. Consider how:

- a cut feels different to a toothache or headache;
- a bruise feels different to sunburn;

- banging your elbow - the 'funnybone' - and hitting the nerve is different to a stomach ache.

Pain in advanced illness can be caused by:

- The disease itself, such as a tumour damaging or putting pressure on bones, organs or nerves; expanding in a confined space; or causing blockages;
- Problems as a result of the disease, such as stiffness from being less active;
- Treatments, for example after surgery, or side effects of radiotherapy and chemotherapy;
- Infection or inflammation;
- Problems unrelated to the disease such as a pre-existing arthritis.

But that is only part of the experience of pain.

Pain is a perception made up of its physical cause, how you are feeling, and the meaning you give to the pain. Pain intensity can be influenced by lack of sleep, loneliness, stress, anger, fear, worry, or feeling out of control.

You may have more than one pain, and more than one type of pain, at the same time.

Understanding the different causes and types of pain, and what medicines and techniques are available for pain management, will help you to manage your pain more effectively.

## How is pain treated?

Your pain is treated and managed according to your diagnosis, stage of disease, response to pain and treatments, and personal preferences.

The best way to get rid of pain is to remove the cause. When this isn't possible there are a number of ways to control and relieve pain, and a variety of people who can help.

**Medication:** Painkilling medication forms the basis of most pain control in advanced illness.

The types of medication recommended and prescribed will vary according to the cause or causes of your pain. Medication needs to target the type of pain you have, and the severity of that pain.

**Complementary Therapies:** Acupuncture, hot and cold packs, massage, relaxation, meditation, stress management or talking about your feelings with someone you trust can all be very effective and are simple and safe.

**Changing your daily activities:** You may notice that some activities, or levels of activity, increase your pain and you may need to change or modify some of the things you normally do.

**Nerve blocks:** can be used when pain is in an area involving one nerve and when the pain is difficult to control with medication

**Cancer Treatment:** (Chemotherapy and Radiation Treatments) These relieve pain by directly affecting tumours, by reducing swelling and pressure.

**Palliative care nurses:** have specialist knowledge in managing pain and can advise and support you

**Physiotherapists & Occupational Therapists:** can help manage pain by providing advice on exercise, movement, and positioning,

and equipment and techniques for making the tasks of everyday life easier.

## What can I do?

**Let people know you have pain** whether it is mild or severe.

Discuss any worries you may have about taking medication with your doctor or nurse.

## Keep a record or diary

Keeping a record of your pain and the medication you take helps you to get a clear picture of your pain, and how effective your pain medication and treatment is.

It will give you and your doctor or nurse good information to work with, as well as identifying the type or types of pain you have, as different pains can require different management.

## Take medicines as prescribed

Let your doctor and nurse know if it isn't working, or if you experience unpleasant side effects.

## Don't 'put up' with pain.

The most important thing you can do is let your doctor or nurse know you are in pain, whether it is mild or severe, so that they can help you.

Some people think it is 'weak' to give in to pain; but relieving pain frees energy for more important things.

"Putting up" with pain can cause lack of sleep, exhaustion, poor appetite, depression and stress, making day-to-day living difficult for both you and the people close to you.

## If at first you don't succeed...

Don't give up.

Sometimes pain responds quickly to one approach, but complex pain can take some time until the correct approach is found and involves adjustment to medications, treatments and your daily activities.

Pain is not static – things change. There may be times when previously well-controlled pain becomes poorly controlled again. Always let your doctor or nurse know if this happens so they can reassess the pain and work with you to regain control of your pain.

Stress, fear, depression, anxiety, and fatigue can alter your level of pain.

Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any concerns, so that they can discuss some management options with you. It may be helpful to meet with a **social worker, psychologist, or pastoral care worker** as they are skilled in providing support and can work with you to help overcome some of these problems.

## **Related fact sheets**

Pain relief medication

My Pain Chart

My Pain Diary – frequently asked questions

## **Other Resources**

Information booklets about morphine are available from your palliative care team.

<http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk/> has excellent information on pain and pain management.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

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