

Side Effects - Pain

Cancer and the side effects of treatment can cause pain. Pain can suppress the immune system, increase the time it takes your body to heal, interfere with sleep and affect your mood.

Types of pain after treatment include:

- Pain or numbness in the hands and feet due to injured nerves from chemotherapy or surgery. For more information on nervous system changes, page 110.
- Painful scars from surgery.
- Pain in a missing limb or breast. While doctors don't know why this pain occurs, it is real. It's not just "in your mind." This is sometimes called phantom pain.

Keep track of your pain levels. The questions below will help you describe the pain to your provider or nurse:

- What part of your body feels painful?
- What does the pain feel like? Is it sharp, burning, shooting or throbbing?
- When does the pain start? How long does it last?
- What activities (such as eating, sleeping or other activities) does pain interfere with?
- What makes the pain feel better or worse? Do ice packs, heating pads or exercises help? Does pain medicine help? How much do you take? How often do you take it?
- How bad is the pain, on a scale of 1 to 10, where "10" is the most pain and "1" is the least pain?

Controlling pain is an important part of your cancer treatment plan. With your help, your health care team can assess how severe your pain is and may recommend:

- **Acupuncture.** This is a proven method that uses needles at pressure points to reduce pain.
- **Hypnosis, meditation or yoga.** A trained specialist can teach you these approaches.
- **Relaxation skills.** Deep relaxation can help relieve pain or reduce stress.
- **Physical therapy.** The therapist may use heat, cold, massage, pressure and/or exercise.
- **Pain-relief medicines.** Providers will try the mildest medicines first. Take all medicines as prescribed.
- **Braces.** These limit movement of a painful limb or joint.
- **Antidepressant medicines.** Prescribed to reduce pain or numbness from injured nerves.

Talk with your health care team

- The pain isn't getting better or going away with pain medicine or you feel new pain.
 - The pain comes on quickly.
 - The pain makes it hard to eat, sleep or perform your normal activities.
 - You have side effects from the pain medicine such as sleepiness, nausea or constipation.
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