

# Pain and Symptom Management: Talk to Your Health Care Team

**It is important to tell your health care team about any pain you feel. Pain and related symptoms, such as discomfort, can help determine whether your cancer has spread to other parts of the body and the location of the tumors. This fact sheet covers:**

- Where your pain comes from
- Ways to describe your pain
- How to record details of your pain



## Origins of Your Pain

Pain is our body's way of telling us that something is wrong. Knowing the origin of the pain – where it is coming from – can help tell us whether the pain comes:

- Directly from your cancer.
- From side effects due to treatment.
- Because of surgery or other procedures, due to healing or complication.

When you experience pain or discomfort, try to think about where you feel it, when and how often. Did it happen all of a sudden? Did the pain move from one area to another? Is it dull, sharp, burning, pinching or stabbing?



## What Kind of Pain Is It?

How often does your pain occur?

- **Acute pain:** usually doesn't last a long time and can range in amount
- **Chronic pain:** can last more than a couple of days and range in amount
- **Breakthrough pain:** occurs suddenly and can be during certain movements or activities

**What is the intensity of your pain?** Is the pain mild, moderate or severe? You can also rate the pain in terms of a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning no pain and 10 the worst pain possible.

**Does anything make the pain worse?** For example, does standing or sitting make it hurt more? Is it worse at night or during the day? Does a change in temperature make it better or worse?

**Does anything help the pain go away?** Do you feel better if you massage the area or if you lie down or walk around? If you use pain medication, what do you use and how long does it last?

**Is the pain affecting your everyday life?** Is pain disturbing your sleep or your ability to eat? Does it affect your ability to complete activities of daily living?



## A Pain and Symptom Journal

Recording the details of your pain and discomfort can be a great help. This can be in a notebook, on your phone or any other way. These details can help show patterns of when the pain is worst or if it is related to other things.

Work with your health care team to list all of your medications and types of treatment, including dosage and when they are taken. You may find it helpful to write down information such as:

- When the pain or discomfort occurred and for how long
- How strong the pain or discomfort was on a scale of 1-10
- How the pain or discomfort impacts your daily activities

You should also record these things in the same place:

- Contact information for each member of your health care team
- When to call your doctor and/or go to the emergency room with a symptom
- Questions or concerns you have

When you next meet with your health care team, you will have these details prepared to discuss with them.

If you feel an intense amount of pain, contact your doctor immediately or consider going to the emergency room.

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