Pain or discomfort

Pain is an uncomfortable, unpleasant physical feeling. It usually happens when you have an injury or illness. Around half of the people who have treatment for cancer have some pain.

Pain may be caused by the cancer pressing on tissue around it, such as a nerve or bone. Treatment, such as surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy may also cause pain. Or pain may be due to other conditions, such as arthritis or diabetes.

Treating pain can help you feel better in lots of ways. It can give you more energy and help reduce anxiety. You’ll be more able to enjoy day-to-day activities with your family and friends.

There are many types of painkiller and different ways of taking them. Painkillers can be taken as:

- tablets or capsules
- skin patches
- gels and sprays
- an injection or drip.

Other drugs can be used to help control pain, including steroids, bisphosphonates to strengthen bone and anti-epileptics and anti-depressants to reduce nerve pain.

Tips to manage pain

- Tell your doctors and nurses if you have pain. The earlier you have treatment for pain, the more effective it is.
- For the best treatment, describe your pain clearly – where is it, what is it like, how bad is it and when does it happen. It may help to keep a pain diary to help describe your pain.
- Take the painkillers regularly as they have been prescribed. The pharmacist or nurse can help you with this.
- Don’t delay using painkillers. It can also make the pain more difficult to control. There is no need to save painkillers until you’re very ill or your pain is severe.
- Tell the doctor or nurse if the pain gets worse so they can adjust the dose.
- Try to sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- A physiotherapist can help you stay active, which can help to improve pain.
- Heat pads and ice packs may help.
- Watching TV, listening to music or chatting to a friend are ways of using your mind to think of something else and cope better with the pain.
- Non-drug treatments, such as complementary therapies or a TENS machine, may relieve pain or help you cope with it. Before you try any complementary therapies, it is important to let your doctor know. Some of them may affect other treatments you are taking.
- Feeling better emotionally may make your physical pain feel better. Talking about your feelings to someone close can help. Your GP or specialist nurse can help you to find local support groups or counselling organisations.
Local resources:

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National resources:

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<tr>
<td>The British Pain Society</td>
<td><a href="http://www.britishpainsociety.org">www.britishpainsociety.org</a>; Tel: 020 7269 7840; Email: <a href="mailto:info@britishpainsociety.org">info@britishpainsociety.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pain Concern</td>
<td><a href="http://www.painconcern.org.uk">www.painconcern.org.uk</a>; Tel: 0300 123 0789; Email: <a href="mailto:help@painconcern.org.uk">help@painconcern.org.uk</a></td>
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Further information

- MAC11670 Managing cancer pain
- MAC11671 Controlling the symptoms of cancer
- MAC11645 Cancer and complementary therapies
- macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/pain

More information and support

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don’t have to go through it alone.

Visit macmillan.org.uk or call us on 0808 808 00 00, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

Hard of hearing? Use textphone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay. Speak another language? We have telephone interpreters. We provide information in a range of languages and formats. Visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call us.