

14. Pain

Pain is often the most feared symptom of cancer and can greatly affect quality of life. Pain can lead a person to feel helpless, hopeless and irritable and over time can lead to depression. Unresolved pain can make it hard for people to do everyday things such as cooking, sleeping, bathing and washing, yet it may be hard for friends and family to fully understand what the patient is going through.

Pain may be caused by the tumour itself, by the treatment given for the cancer or by something completely unrelated to the cancer (e.g. arthritis). **The amount of pain someone feels is not related to the severity or extent of their cancer and it is not a reliable sign of the disease getting worse.**

These days most doctors believe that 90-95% of cancer pain can be effectively treated. The difficulty is that professionals do not always regularly ask their patients about pain, and patients do not always report any pain they have, or sometimes fail to take the pain medication they have been prescribed (believing for example that they may become addicted or develop tolerance to the pain medication). Consequently pain is often undertreated.

What can be done to manage my pain?

- It is important that you tell your doctor about any pain you are experiencing because pain can often be well controlled. There is no sensible reason to be in pain if it can be successfully treated.
- If you are in pain it should be properly assessed and managed by a doctor or palliative care nurse (palliative care and Macmillan nurses are highly trained in supporting patients who experience pain).
- Ensure that you are taking any medication that you have been prescribed for your pain correctly, i.e. the right dose at the right times.
- Many people worry about taking painkillers. If you have any concerns or fears about the pain medicine you have been prescribed then please discuss these with your doctor.
- Alternative methods of pain control may be suitable to treat your pain; e.g. a TENS machine (electrical nerve stimulation), acupuncture, use of heat and cold and massage.
- Anxiety and stress tend to increase pain sensitivity (making it feel worse). Relaxation techniques can help reduce pain by reducing anxiety. *(See section on Worry, fear or anxiety in this directory.)*
- Distraction can be a helpful strategy by focusing your attention away from the pain and onto something more positive. Engaging in meaningful and stimulating activities can reduce your awareness of pain.
- You may feel better with some emotional and psychological support. Pain can evoke strong feelings, such as anger, anxiety, fear and hopelessness and these emotions can often make the pain seem worse. Therefore talking through these emotions and understanding better what is evoking them often helps. If you do not feel comfortable talking about pain with your friends and family you could try a local support group where you can get the opportunity to talk about your pain with people that know how it feels.

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Livewell South West: Mindfulness Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life's pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p>	<p>Livewell South West: To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p>Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers</p>	<p>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935</p>
<p>Other Resources</p>	<p>Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse or Clinical Psychologist.</p>

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>The British Pain Society Provides contemporary guidance, supported by available evidence, on clinical and other pain matters.</p>	<p>www.britishpainsociety.org/pub_patient.html</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.</p>	<p>www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)</p>

Further Information:

<p>Macmillan Cancer Support booklets: available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre</p>	<p>Marie Curie Leaflets: available free from www.mariecurie.org.uk</p>
Controlling cancer pain	Guide to Managing your pain
Controlling the symptoms of cancer	
Understanding chemotherapy	
Understanding radiotherapy	