

CAUSES AND TREATMENT OF PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH CANCER

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When the word “cancer” is mentioned, often the first association is thinking of someone in pain. Unfortunately the reason is that cancer can cause pain and for several reasons:

Examples of pain caused by cancer—

- Hemorrhage into a cancerous growth
- Fracture of a bone weakened by cancer metastases
- Blockage of a bile duct, ureter, or bowel by cancer involving those tissues
- Cancer involving liver, bone, soft tissue, brain or nerve

Examples of pain caused by cancer treatment—

- Diagnostic intervention such as needle biopsy
- Drugs causing mucositis, hand-foot syndrome, or neuropathy
- Injury of tissue by radiation
- Surgical incisions

It is important to make a thorough assessment of pain. A good tool to know is this mnemonic:

P Provoke/Palliate—what makes the pain worse or better?

Q Quality of pain—burning, sharp or dull?

R Radiate—does the pain spread through parts of the body?

S Severity—scale of 0 to 10

T Timing—all of the time or some of the time?

Cancer pain is treatable, no matter the cause. Appropriate management should result in reasonable comfort, but it is a process of on-going re-assessment and adjustment of treatment. Drug management is done in a step-wise fashion:

- Mild pain—non-opioid drugs such as acetaminophen, aspirin, or NSAID
- Mild to moderate pain—begin with short-acting opioids
- Moderate to severe pain—opioids are appropriate, consider long-acting formulation and short-acting drugs for breakthrough episodes
- Control of pain is an important part of the treatment of patients with cancer.

References:

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