

Pain, Nerves and Muscles Potential Changes with Chemotherapy

It is common for cancer patients to feel pain. Pain may be caused by cancer or cancer treatments. Pain can be managed to provide a level of comfort to do day-to-day activities. It is important to understand cancer- and treatment-related pain and how to control it.

Why Pain Should Be Treated

Pain can affect you in many ways. It can keep you from being active, sleeping well, enjoying time with family and friends and eating. Pain can make you feel afraid or depressed. Pain may also prevent you from participating in your care and can slow your recovery from cancer treatment.

Most cancer pain can be managed with treatment. When you have less pain, you may be more active and interested in doing things you enjoy. Tell your doctor or nurse **right away** if you are feeling any pain. Getting help for your pain early can make pain treatment more effective.

Causes

You may have pain for many reasons. Most cancer pain occurs when a tumor presses on bone, nerves or body organs. Cancer treatment or surgical procedures can also cause pain.

You may also have pain that has nothing to do with your illness or treatment. You may have headaches, muscle strains and other aches and pains before your cancer treatment. If you are taking medicine for cancer treatment or pain, talk with your health care team about what you can take for these everyday aches and pains.

Other conditions such as arthritis can also cause pain. Pain from other conditions can be treated along with cancer pain. Tell your health care team about your medical history. They will discuss how each condition can be treated and what may work best for you.

Treatment

Cancer pain is most often treated with medicine. Radiation, surgery and other treatments can be used along with pain medicine to help relieve pain. There are also ways to lessen pain without medicine. Ask your health care team about how other therapies or treatments might help you.

It is important to treat pain early. Waiting until it becomes very bad may need more medicine and make it harder to treat. **Check with your health care team before you take any over-the-counter pain relievers.** They may interfere with or worsen side effects from cancer treatment.



Nerves and Muscles

It is common for patients on chemotherapy to have nerve- and muscle-related side effects. Nerve and muscle pain can be due to cancer or cancer treatments that can irritate nerves and muscles.

Some chemotherapy can cause a condition known as peripheral neuropathy. You may have tingling, burning or numbness in your hands or feet. **Tell your health care team right away if you start to notice these symptoms.** They can find ways to manage this side effect.

Other nerve-related symptoms may include dizziness, lightheadedness, loss of balance and clumsiness. You may have trouble picking up objects or walking. You may also shake or tremble. There may be changes to your vision or hearing. Some chemotherapy medicines can lead to weak, tired or sore muscles.

In most cases, these symptoms are temporary and get better with time. Sometimes they persist after chemotherapy. Nerve and muscle symptoms that do not go away may mean serious problems that need medical attention.

Before you start any new treatment, tell your health care team if you have any nerve or muscle symptoms. Also tell them of any new symptoms that develop at any time during treatment.

To manage nerve or muscle-related side effects:

- Change positions slowly if you are lightheaded or dizzy to prevent falls.
- Do the following for numbness or tingling in the hands or feet:
 - Wear shoes or slippers when walking.
 - Test bath water temperature with your elbow.
 - Hold hot mugs by the handle, not the cup.
 - Use caution with sharp objects.
- Use handrails when going up or down stairs for balance or muscle strength problems.
- Ask for help if you are too weak or in too much pain to complete a task.

Resources

For more information, ask for a copy of the following patient education documents or view them in your MyChart account.

- **Cancer Pain Management**
- **Pain Rating Scales**
- **Peripheral Neuropathy**

Visit the American Cancer Society website:

https://bit.ly/ACS_CancerPain