

FAST FACTS: Cancer Pain

Cancer pain is reported by 59% of adults undergoing cancer treatment, 64% of those with advanced disease, and 33% after curative treatment. Pain is one of the symptoms individuals fear most. Evidence in oncology literature indicates that quality of life and survival are linked to early and effective palliative care, including pain management.

Approximately 75% of cancer pain is related to the direct tumor involvement while about 25% is related to cancer treatments (e.g. chemotherapy and radiation). Cancer related pain is often severe and therefore treated with opioid analgesics and adjuvant analgesics depending upon cancer site and associated symptoms. Scheduled routine medications are the best method of controlling cancer pain. Pain treatments are prescribed based upon pain intensity and quality (feeling).

- Cancer pain treatments vary depending upon if the older adult is opioid naïve or opioid tolerant. Cancer pain is generally nociceptive or pain impacting muscle, bone, and/or organs. Pain may be caused by tumor invasion, inflammation of soft tissue, obstruction of bowel, or bone metastasis.
 - Bone and muscle pain (nociceptive/somatic) generally described as achy and dull. Pain is localized where the older adult can identify area causing discomfort.
 - Organ and intestinal pain (nociceptive/visceral) are often described as cramping, pressure, or deep ache. The pain causes referred pain to other sites with back pain a commonly referred site of tumors involving the pancreas, esophagus, stomach, and colon/rectum.
 - Nociceptive pain is treated by intensity using NSAIDS and/or Opioid Analgesics.
- Cancer treatment pain generally impacts the nerve and causes (neuropathic) pain.
 - Neuropathic pain is described as sharp, burning, shooting, and tingly.
 - Common pain sites are hands, feet, and back.
 - Neuropathic pain is treated by sensation using adjuvant medications such as anticonvulsants, antidepressants, and corticosteroids.
- The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Clinical Practice Guidelines (referenced below) provides pharmacological and non-pharmacological guidelines on pain management.
- The NCCN Older Adults Clinical Practice Guidelines are in press (April 2023).
- The NCCN supports a host of consumer resources for family and those with a cancer diagnosis including mobile device apps (see below).

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References

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