

Pain Management Information

Pain has physical, emotional, social and spiritual components. Your Palliative Care Team has special training in all of these components to support you with pain management. This information sheet will focus on physical pain management.

- Pain medications include acetaminophen (Tylenol®), non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (ibuprofen or naproxen), steroids, anesthetics and opioids.
- Sometimes tolerance to medications develops or your disease progresses and a higher dose or medication or the addition of several types of medication are needed.
- Our goal is to have your pain level at less than 3 on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the worst pain you have ever felt).
- We will ask you to keep a journal of your pain level and what medications you are taking so that the Palliative Care Team can adjust your pain medications effectively.

Opioid medications

- Opioid medications are either short-acting or long-acting medications.
- Often both short-acting and long-acting opioid medications are given together to maintain pain control. A short-acting opioid is taken in addition to a long-acting opioid medication to ensure optimal pain control. The dosage is determined by your provider based on your pain level. Ideally, once your medication is adjusted for optimal pain control, you will not need very much of the short-acting opioid.
- You may have nausea when first starting the opioid medication. This usually improves with continued use of the medication. If the nausea persists, the opioid medication can be changed. Please notify your provider if you are experiencing nausea or vomiting so that an anti-nausea medication can be prescribed for you.
- You may have constipation. Opioids can slow the movement of stool through your intestine. Make sure that you have a laxative at home. Keep track of your bowel movements. (See the separate handout on constipation).
- Once you have become adjusted to the medication, you may resume driving a car or operate heavy equipment.
- An opioid medication used for pain management does not produce “addiction”. Addiction occurs when an opioid is used not for pain management.
- Refills of opioid medication need to be requested 3 business days before the refill is needed. Some opioid medication requests cannot be faxed or sent electronically to the pharmacy and need to be requested in person with the written prescription.

We hope that this information answers most of your questions. Let us know if you have any unanswered questions or concerns. You are not alone. Your Palliative Care Team is here to support you.