

# About Pain

And the help available



**PalliativeCare**  
VICTORIA  
Living, dying & grieving well

## Your Doctor and Palliative Care Team

*The goal is to control your pain and to improve your quality of life.*

Trained health staff work as a team with you and your family carer/s to improve your comfort and quality of life. Your GP, other doctors and a nurse practitioner can assess your pain and prescribe pain medications. One of these trained health staff (called the 'doctor' in this leaflet) coordinates medications to control your pain.

Nurses, physical and occupational therapists, counsellors, spiritual carers, and other trained staff and volunteers may help. Their goal is to improve your quality of life and support your family carer/s.

Ask for help if you are in pain or have other needs or concerns.

## Understanding Pain

### What is pain?

While this may seem an easy question, there is not a simple answer. Pain is complex. It is an uncomfortable physical sensation. Pain can also affect your mental and emotional wellbeing. Everyone feels pain in a different way. This can be due to:

- Different physical causes of pain
- Stress and worry
- Fear
- Depression
- How you feel about coping with pain.

This means a personal approach is necessary to manage each person's pain.

*Pain is always personal.*





## Talking about pain

People you trust can support you when you tell them about your pain. This may be family, friends, a volunteer or counsellor. Don't suffer in silence.

### Seek help early

Let your doctor know when you have pain. Ask for help. Don't wait for your pain to get bad. It is easier to control pain well when it is treated early.



### Describe your pain

It helps to describe clearly how your pain feels and how it affects you. This will help your doctor find the best treatment for you.

Tell your doctor or carer:

- Where in your body you feel pain.
- How often you experience the pain and how long it lasts.
- What the pain feels like - is it aching, throbbing, shooting, or sharp?
- Is your pain constant, or does it come and go?
- How the pain affects your daily life – does it stop you doing any activities?
- What helps with the pain, and what makes it worse?
- If you are taking any medication for the pain and if the medication is helping.
- About sensations that feel like electric shocks.
- If your skin is sensitive to light touch.

It helps to let your doctor or carer know how much pain you are feeling. You can use a pain scale to do this. A score of zero means no pain at all and a score of ten means your pain is the worst you have experienced (more than you can bear).

You can use the pain scale to describe:

- Your pain at its best
- Your pain at its worst
- What your pain is like most of the time
- What level of pain you can accept and live with.

It is important to tell your doctor about all medications and any natural remedies you are taking.

*Describe your pain well and any treatments you are taking. This helps to identify the cause and to treat your pain.*

### Your fears about pain

The fear of pain can make the pain feel worse. Discuss your fears as this can help to reduce your anxiety. It is not a sign of weakness. Being honest about your pain helps your doctor to find the best way to treat it.

Always discuss your pain with the people caring for you. Ask questions you have about your illness, medications and any worries you have.

*Don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask for help early, when it is easier to control pain well.*

# Coping with Pain

## What are your treatment options?



Most pain can be treated. Pain medications help to manage your pain.

If your pain is mild, your local pharmacist can help.

If your pain is moderate to strong, ask your doctor to assess your pain and the causes. They will discuss with you the best treatment options to manage your pain.

Treatment includes medications to reduce inflammation or nerve pain, and opioids such as morphine and oxycodone.

Pain medications can be taken in different ways:

- by mouth, as a liquid, tablet or capsule
- by injection, into the skin, muscle or vein
- on the skin, in a patch.

### Follow your doctor's instructions

It is important to take pain medications at the times instructed by your doctor. Continue to take pain medications your doctor has told you to take regularly, even if you do not feel any pain. This provides the best pain control.

## If I continue to have pain when taking pain medication, what should I do?

Even with regular pain medication, you may experience short bursts of strong pain. This is called "breakthrough" pain as it breaks through your regular pain relief. Your doctor may prescribe extra pain medication. This works quickly to prevent or control breakthrough pain.



If you have breakthrough pain, ask your doctor to review your pain medication. The goal is to meet your needs so you remain comfortable.

Talk to your doctor if your pain relief is not working or if you have any side-effects.

*Plan ahead so your pain medications are available when you need them.*

# Taking opioids to relieve your pain

Trained doctors know how to prescribe opioid medications appropriately. They offer safe and effective relief from moderate to strong pain, when you follow the doctor's instructions.

## Myths and facts

There are many myths about the use of opioids for pain relief. People confuse the recreational use of opium with medications made from the opium plant, such as morphine and oxycodone.

Here are some myths about opioid medications and the facts:

### ► Myth

Taking opioids can lead to addiction.

### ► Fact

Your body builds up a tolerance to the medication. Higher doses may be required to control the pain. This is your body adjusting; it is not an addiction.

### ► Myth

Taking opioids will make death come sooner.

### ► Fact

Opioids prescribed at the right dose will control your pain and do not hasten death.

### ► Myth

Opioids can damage your body.

### ► Fact

Opioids are safe when taken as prescribed by your doctor.

*Opioids are safe and effective when you follow your doctor's instructions.*

## Common side effects of opioid medications

*The side effects of opioid medications are usually short term and manageable.*

Even though opioids provide safe and effective pain relief, they can cause side effects. Most side effects of opioids are short-lived or manageable. Common side effects you may experience are:

- **Constipation** - difficulty in emptying the bowels.  
Constipation is a side effect of opioids for most people. Medications, called laxatives, prevent and treat constipation.
- **Nausea** - a feeling of sickness with the urge to vomit.  
Nausea is common and will often settle after the first few days.
- **Sleepiness**  
You may feel sleepy in the first few days of starting opioids, or after an increase in the dose. Once your body adjusts, you will start to feel more alert again.
- **Slow and ineffective breathing**  
Opioids may cause the feeling of a reduced urge to breathe. This is not common when you take your dose as instructed by your doctor.



# Managing your pain levels with add-on therapies

Some people may find that other add-on therapies also help with pain relief. These are sometimes called complementary therapies. For example:

- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Art therapy
- Music therapy
- Counselling
- Pet therapy
- Hot or cold packs
- Relaxation methods

These extra therapies should not replace treatments prescribed by your doctor.

*Always ask for help if you are in pain. This will help to improve your quality of life.*



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