Pain Relief & Medicine

Pain is a personal feeling or sensation that can be hard to explain to others. It can stop activity or keep you from doing things you want or need to do. It causes both a physical and an emotional reaction. When pain keeps you from being active, it can make you sicker. Our goal is to help relieve your pain enough so that you enjoy living, being with others, and doing as much as your medical condition will allow.

Please know that:

- Waiting to seek pain relief only makes the pain more difficult to control.
- People in pain usually do not need to fear addiction—addicts use drugs for a "high," not for pain.
- Effective pain treatment varies from person to person. You are the best judge of what works for you.
- You cannot take so much medicine that it will not be effective anymore. There is always something that can be done for pain relief.

The best way to control pain is to prevent it or keep it from getting worse. Some people call this "staying on top of the pain," or "staying ahead of the pain." Please tell your hospice nurse if you are having pain.

There are non-medical options that can help with pain relief. These may help a little or a lot. Even if they do not relieve your pain completely, they may help other relief measures, such as pain medicines, work better. Things you can try:

- Changing positions.
- Using warm or cold packs around a painful area.
- Distraction (watching TV, listening to music, talking to others).
- Meditation or prayer.
- Massage.
- Relaxation techniques.

For pain that cannot be relieved in other ways, there are medicines. Although medicine may not take away all pain, the hospice team's goal is to keep the person as comfortable as possible.
There are prescription and over-the-counter medicines that can be used to treat pain. Nonprescription medicines include things like acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen, and capsaicin cream. Prescriptions can include antidepressants, opiates, anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxants, and other classes of medicines.

The most widely used prescription pain relievers have been opioids, such as morphine. Opioids are often very effective at relieving pain, but they can cause side effects. Not everyone has side effects, but some of the more common ones are:

- Drowsiness
- Nausea (upset stomach) or vomiting
- Itchy skin
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth

These side effects are most common when an opioid prescription is first started, or when the dosage is increased. They usually go away within a few days. Your hospice nurse can help you manage any side effects that occur.

One side effect usually does not go away:
Constipation occurs because opioid pain medicines slow bowel function. This usually occurs for as long as you are taking an opioid. Constipation can be managed by using laxatives or stool softeners. There also non-drug approaches that can help reduce discomfort. Your hospice team will help you find a plan that relieves constipation for you.

Side effects from opioids can usually be managed so that pain relief is not compromised. Please talk with your hospice nurse about any side effects that you are having. Your nurse will also be checking with you about your pain medicines and how they are working for you.