

# Controlling Pain



**Kansas City Hospice**  
& PALLIATIVE CARE

## SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects from pain medication may happen in the first few hours or days of treatment. They usually lessen over time. Each person is different and not everyone will have side effects.

### CONSTIPATION

Unfortunately, this side effect of opioids does not usually go away with time, but can be controlled.

Most people need to do two things:

- Start a laxative at the same time as opioids, especially if constipation has been a problem.
- If possible, increase fluids, eat more fruits and vegetables, and stay as active as possible.

### NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Some people taking pain medicine may have an upset stomach or vomiting, most commonly in the first three days.

Have an anti-nausea medicine on hand when you start pain medication. You can take anti-nausea medicine on a regular schedule for several days. It may not be needed after that.

## DESCRIBE YOUR PAIN

Never hesitate to ask your physician or your care team about pain.

Be prepared to describe your pain in detail.

- Where do you hurt?
- Is it sharp, stabbing, burning, tingling, numbing, aching, throbbing?
- How bad is the pain and what makes it better or worse?
- Is it there all the time or does it come and go? Has it changed?
- Is your current pain medicine controlling the pain? Are you having problems with side effects?
- How does the pain affect your mood, activities or ability to interact with others?
- What is your goal for pain relief? What level of pain control do you want to achieve?



**Kansas City Hospice**

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CHÚ Ý: Nếu bạn nói Tiếng Việt, có các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí dành cho bạn. Gọi số 816.363.2600.

“  
Serious pain  
is a medical  
emergency.”

## CONTROLLING PAIN

Uncontrolled pain may cause anxiety or depression. When pain is controlled, you are more likely to:

- Enjoy activities, do household tasks, enjoy company, and sleep
- Respond better to treatment
- Have more active immune system
- Recover faster from surgery
- Be less likely to have nerve changes that extend pain

Today, there are excellent treatments for pain, including medication taken by mouth. If swallowing is a problem, options include a skin patch, suppository, or injection.

When pain is harder to control, more medications, radiation (for cancer), nerve blocks or surgery may be needed.

The most effective strategies may combine several medications, therapies, and mind-body techniques such as relaxation exercises, listening to music, distraction with pleasant activities, massage, imagery, hot or cold packs, rest, counseling and support groups.

**You have a right to pain relief.** Ask your care team how they plan to treat pain. When you're in pain, tell your team. Give them details to help in providing the best treatment.

## PAIN MEDICATION

There are many medications to control pain. You may need a combination of two or more.

If you have constant pain, take your medicine on a regular schedule and **don't wait for pain to begin.**

It's good to have a fast-acting medicine on hand for “flare-up” or what's often called “breakthrough” pain.

## COMMON TREATMENTS

### Mild to Moderate Pain

- Over-the-counter options: aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen (Motrin), and naproxen (Aleve).
- Each may have serious side effects.
- Do not start without asking your doctor if they can be taken with your other medication and about other precautions.

### Moderate to Severe Pain

- Opioids need a prescription: morphine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, fentanyl, methadone, and hydromorphone.
- Opioids can be combined with other medicines and do not cause stomach bleeding or organ damage.
- They DO cause constipation, so start a laxative at the same time.
- They may also cause nausea, sleepiness or itching.
- Rarely, opioids may cause slow breathing in higher doses.

## COMBINING MEDICATION

Some drugs work best when combined with other drugs, called adjuvants, that help slow pain signals.

**Antidepressants** like amitriptyline, desipramine, nortriptyline, and duloxetine help control tingling or burning pain. They also can help improve sleep. Some antidepressants can cause dry mouth, drowsiness, constipation, or dizziness.

**Anticonvulsants** include gabapentin, valproic acid, and carbamazepine. They treat seizures and help ease nerve pain, especially feelings of tingling, stabbing, or electrical shock. Some can cause nausea or dizziness, and may require blood tests to monitor side effects.

**Steroids** like prednisone and dexamethasone help with cancer or bone pain, pain caused by inflammation, pressure on nerves, or tumors. They can increase appetite, fluid retention, stomach irritation, and confusion.

**Anti-inflammatories** include ibuprofen, naproxen, and meloxicam. They can be added to stronger drugs for bone pain or inflammation. but can cause kidney, stomach. or bleeding problems.