

Eight Facts Everyone Should Know About Cancer Pain

FEARS:

Cancer causes severe pain that cannot be relieved.

Patients who take pain medicine will become addicted.

When you use pain medicine your body becomes used to its effects and pretty soon it won't work anymore.

If you talk about pain, people will think you're a complainer.

Talking about pain will distract your doctor from working to cure your cancer.

It's easier to put up with pain than the side effects that come with pain medicines.

Pain medicine will make you feel "out of it."

If your pain is relieved, you won't know what's going on with your cancer.

FACTS:

Cancer can cause pain. For some, the pain can be severe. What's important is that almost all cancer pain CAN be relieved.

Addiction is a common concern, but in fact it rarely occurs in persons with cancer who take medicines for pain control.

Pain medicines like morphine do not stop working even if they are taken for weeks, months, or longer. If pain increases, the dose of medicine can be increased as much as needed, or other medicines can be used.

Asking for pain relief is not "complaining." Suffering in silence can wear patients down and make them less able to take part in treatments and daily life.

Talking about pain will help the doctor provide the best care for the cancer. Pain can get in the way of sleep, rest, and meaningful activities, which are all important to quality of life and to the body's ability to fight disease.

Pain medicines like morphine do cause side effects in some patients. Constipation is very common, and patients should ask their health care providers for advice on how to treat it. Nausea can be treated and will likely go away on its own in a few days.

Patients may feel drowsy or "out of it" for a few days after starting pain medicines like morphine. With continued, regular use of the medicine, this feeling will usually go away after a few days.

Pain is only one of the clues that tells what is going on with the cancer. Many other tests can be done.

Based in part on the Barriers Questionnaire-II, Gunnarsdottir S, Donovan HS, Serlin RC, Voge C, Ward S (2002)

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