

Many people experience pain during the last weeks, days, or hours of life.

However, with the right treatment and support, most people can remain comfortable at the end of life. Keeping you or your loved one comfortable is a priority for your hospice team.

There are several types of pain. Some of the most common types include:

- **Acute pain** is pain that comes on suddenly and lasts for a short time.
- **Chronic pain** is pain that lasts a long time. It can be constant, or it can come and go.
- **Neuropathic or nerve pain** is caused by damage to the nerves themselves. It may feel like stabbing, burning, sharp pain or tingling.
- **Bone pain** can happen if there is damage to bones, including bone cancer. It often feels like an intense aching pain and may be worse with movement.
- **Breakthrough pain** is when there is pain even when taking pain medications. The pain ‘breaks through’ the pain medications.

Recognizing Pain

When talking to your loved one about pain, you and your hospice team may ask some of the following questions:

- Where is the pain in your body?
- Does the pain travel to other parts of your body?
- What does the pain feel like? For example:
 - Tingling
 - Burning
 - Aching
 - Tender to touch
 - Dull
 - Sharp
 - Shooting
 - Throbbing
- Can you rate the pain on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you can imagine?
- How often do you have pain?
- Does anything make the pain better, such as resting or pain medicines?
- Does anything make the worse, such as moving, eating, or taking a deep breath?
- How is the pain affecting your life?

If you are caring for someone who has trouble communicating, it can be hard to know if they're in pain or what type of pain they have. You can look for common non-verbal signs of pain, such as:

- Frowning
- Changes in mood
- Changes in routine such as refusing food
- Changes in posture
- Agitation or distress
- Not being able to concentrate
- Becoming withdrawn or not making eye contact
- Changes in breathing
- Groaning
- Sensitive to touch
- Feeling restless

These may be signs that your loved one needs a dose of pain medication or needs an additional pain medication. It is important to notify your hospice team if you notice any of these signs, or if you suspect your loved one has new pain, worsening pain, or pain not managed by their current medication or care.

How to Use Pain Medications

Your hospice team will help you understand how and when to use pain medications. It is always best to talk with your hospice team before giving extra doses of pain medication to make sure this is safe for your or your loved one. Your hospice team will also want to know when extra doses are needed so that they can adjust you or your loved one's medication, if necessary.

Other Ways to Help Relieve Pain

In addition to medications, there are some other ways to help manage pain. These include:

- Massage, aromatherapy, reflexology
- Relaxation techniques (meditation, music)
- Acupuncture
- Pet therapy
- Heat and cold (hot water bottles, warm baths, ice packs)

Talk to your hospice team for other ideas for helping to manage your loved one's pain.

Reference: Marie Curie, 2023, *Pain when someone is dying*, Accessed: 11/10/2023. Available from:
<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/terminal-illness/preparing/pain-when-dying>