



Symptom Management: Pain

Some patients with lung cancer may experience pain during their cancer journey. In order to successfully manage the pain it is essential the pain is fully assessed and to understand there may be several different types of pain, which may in part be a reflection of emotional distress.

With an effective assessment and systematic approach to pain management 80% of cancer pain can be controlled.

Causes

Pain can be caused by the cancer pressing on the tissues around it or on a nerve. Nerve pain is called neuropathic pain.

Some treatments for cancer can also damage or injure tissues. Surgery causes pain, as tissues are cut or damaged. Radiotherapy and chemotherapy can also damage tissues. For example, chemotherapy can damage the soft tissues in the mouth, causing soreness; radiotherapy can damage the skin in the area being treated. The pain usually goes away once the treatments are completed and the damaged tissues have healed.

Emotions such as fear, anxiety, depression and tiredness can make your pain feel and seem worse.

Management

If you are suffering with pain, please ensure your doctor and specialist nurse are aware. They will work with you to help control the pain and refer you to the correct professional who can help.

Assessment

In order for your pain to be managed effectively you need to be accurately assessed. For your assessment please consider these questions:

- Where is the pain?
- What is the pain like?
- Is the pain there all the time?
- Does anything make the pain worse or better?
- How does the pain affect your daily life?

Keeping a diary of your pain may help the assessment.

Medication

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a three-step "ladder" for cancer pain relief.

If pain occurs, there should be prompt administration of drugs in the following order:

- Non-opioids such as aspirin and paracetamol
- Mild opioids such as codeine or tramadol
- Strong opioids such as morphine, oxycodone, fentanyl or diamorphine

At every level, extra medications called adjuvants such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, steroids, and paracetamol can be added to increase the effectiveness of the pain killers.

To maintain freedom from pain, drugs should be given "by the clock", that is every 3-6 hours, rather than "on demand" This three-step approach of administering the right drug in the right dose at the right time is inexpensive and 80-90% effective.

Side effects

All medications have side effects. This does not mean you will suffer from them, however the most common side effects are:

- Constipation
- Drowsiness
- Feeling tired
- Dry mouth
- Sickness

Many side effects can be avoided or managed with additional medications.

Source: National Lung Cancer Forum For Nurses

Other treatments

Other methods of pain control can be used on their own or in combination with painkillers. These can include:

- Nerve blocks
- Physiotherapy
- Acupuncture
- Relaxation, visualisation
- Emotional support
- Hypnotherapy
- Radiotherapy
- Chemotherapy
- Biological treatments
- Surgery