

## Medications Used to Treat Cancer Pain

If you have cancer, you may experience pain. Your pain may be mild or severe. You may not be in pain often, or your pain may be longer lasting. There are many kinds of medications used to treat pain from cancer. The 3 types typically used are non-opioid medications, opioid medications, and other pain relief medications.

### Non-opioid medications

Non-opioid medications include:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) – provides pain relief and reduces fever
  - Can cause liver problems if used in high doses
  - Maximum recommended dose is 2,000 to 4,000 milligrams (mg) per day. Talk with your healthcare provider about specific 24-hour limits
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) and naproxen (Aleve®) – provide pain relief, reduce fever and fight inflammation
  - Can cause stomach bleeding, kidney problems and general bleeding
  - To prevent ulcers, other medications may be used, such as esomeprazole (Nexium®)

### Opioid medications

Opioids (sometimes called “narcotics”) are used for all types of moderate to severe pain. Narcotics may make you drowsy. Do not drive a car or other vehicles, or use dangerous equipment. Do not drink alcohol.

#### ***Short-acting opioid medications***

These medications have a peak (maximum) effect in 1 hour.

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| ■ Codeine                                      | ■ Oxycodone IR          |
| ■ Hydrocodone/acetaminophen (Vicodin®, Norco®) | ■ Oxymorphone (Opana®)  |
| ■ Hydromorphone (Dilaudid®)                    | ■ Tapentadol (Nucynta®) |
| ■ Morphine IR or liquid morphine               | ■ Tramadol (Ultram®)    |

#### ***Long-acting opioid medications***

For most people, the best way to relieve pain is to treat most of the pain with long-acting opioids. These medications are taken on a schedule “around-the-clock.”

- Fentanyl patch (Duragesic®)
- Methadone
- Morphine (MS Contin®, long-acting morphine)
  - ER for extended release
  - CR for controlled release
  - SA for sustained action
  - SR for sustained release

- Oxycodone CR, SA or SR (OxyContin®, Xtampza®)
- Tapentadol (Nucynta® ER)
- Tramadol ER (Ultram® ER)

## Other medications used to relieve pain

Some medications are used for other problems but are useful in relieving pain — especially nerve pain.

- Anticonvulsants such as gabapentin (Neurontin®) or pregabalin (Lyrica®)
- Antidepressants such as nortriptyline (Pamelor®), venlafaxine (Effexor®) or duloxetine (Cymbalta®)
- Local anesthetics such as lidocaine (Lidoderm® patch)
- Steroids such as dexamethasone (Decadron®)

## Constipation

Almost everyone who takes opioid pain medication becomes constipated. It is easier to prevent constipation than to treat it. **The goal is to have a bowel movement every day or every other day, even if you are not eating.**

### *To prevent constipation*

Take a laxative/stool softener such as senna/docusate sodium (Senokot-S®, Peri-Colace®, Senna-S®, many others), as directed.

### *To treat constipation*

Take a laxative such as bisacodyl (tablets or suppositories), milk of magnesia or magnesium citrate, as directed.

For your safety, do not use suppositories or enemas if your platelet and white blood cell counts are very low.

## Your treatment

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## Plan ahead

You need to bring a paper prescription for an opioid to your pharmacy. ***Do not wait until you are almost out of the medication to ask for a new prescription.***

## Medication safety

Good pain control is important to your recovery. Pain medications are a part of that care.

Narcotic pain medications are powerful, so it is important that you take them only as directed. Unfortunately, the misuse and abuse of pain medications has become a serious problem.

- It is important that your medications are kept in a safe place where they would not be taken by guests or others who enter your home.
- Narcotic pain medications should **not** be kept in the medication cabinet or left out where they can be easily seen. It is best to lock up these medications.
- **Never** share these medications with family members or friends.
- Nasal naloxone (Narcan<sup>®</sup>, Evzio<sup>®</sup>) is available at no cost for the emergency treatment of overdose.
- When pain medications are no longer needed, bring them to a take-back program or drop-off box. Ask your pharmacist or check the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration website for locations in your community. Go to **nm.org/safemeddisposal** for more information.

It helps to bring all your pill bottles to the clinic so we know about any changes in your medications, when they were last filled and other important information.

**If you have any questions, call the Northwestern Memorial Hospital Cancer Pain Program at 312.695.0990 (TTY: 711).**