



Cancer Pain Management

Seeking relief at home



Pain is one of the most common symptoms experienced by cancer patients. It can be a dull throbbing, a sharp shooting stab, or even a burning sensation. If left untreated this pain can affect the patient's quality of life. It can be physically and emotionally exhausting. It can also lead to depression, anxiety, and stress which adversely affect the patient's condition.

A cancer patient doesn't necessarily have to live with pain.

95% of the cancer pain is treatable.

Source: Levy MH. Pharmacologic treatment of cancer pain. *N Engl J Med.* 1996;335:1124-1132

In fact, controlling pain is a critical part of the treatment. A collaborative approach involving doctors, nurses, family caregivers, community, etc. can help a cancer patient get pain relief and improve quality of life.

Types of Cancer Pain

Cancer pain can be because of the tumor, the curative treatment, or issues that are not related to cancer directly. Similarly, the intensity of the pain may also vary on a day-to-day basis.



Acute Pain

This type of pain comes suddenly and subsides after some time. It can range from mild to severe.



Chronic Pain

This is a more constant kind of a pain that continues to grow in intensity over a period of time.



Breakthrough Pain

This pain hits the patient suddenly and is intense in nature. It can leave a patient debilitated for the time that it lasts.

Managing Cancer Pain

In order to manage the cancer pain, it has to be recorded properly. However, this can happen only when the patients start talking about pain.

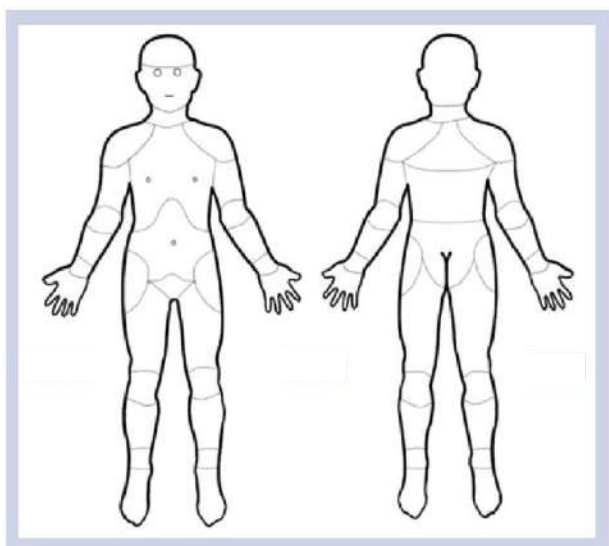
As a home-based cancer care provider, we have come across many patients who do not talk about their pain. They feel that talking about pain would make them look weak in front of their family who is also struggling with the illness. At times, they feel that talking about pain would just stall their treatment. However, it is crucial to talk about pain to improve the treatment outcomes.

- **Describe Issues**

We always encourage our patients to share more specific details about the pain they experience. We encourage them to describe the sharpness of their pain – mild, severe, or intense. They describe the pain as a throb or a stab or a burning sensation and how long it lasts.

How Pain Can Be Described?

Pricking	Stabbing	Sharp	Burning
Tingling/Pins & Needles	Aching	Shooting	Difficult to Describe



Cancer patients may also take note of what activity triggers their pain and what provides them relief.

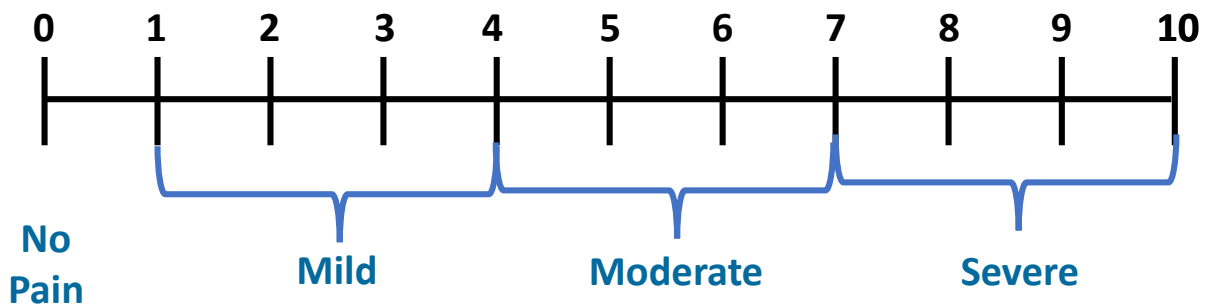
We also use a body chart to enable patients to point the location of their pain.



• Quantify Pain

There are two common methods that are used to help patients quantify their pain. The first one is the numerical scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is the moderate and 10 is the most intense. Patient can assign a numerical value that best describes the intensity of pain they experience.

Numeric Pain Rating Scale



The other method that is commonly used for quantifying pain is called faces pain scale. Under this method, a patient is shown 6 different facial expressions ranging from no pain to extreme pain to describe their condition.



PAIN SCALE LEVEL



• Maintain Pain Record

It is important that cancer patients maintain a detailed record of their pain experience. This record should ideally include date and time of the pain, description of the pain, intensity of the pain, notable activity that triggered pain, measures taken, pain intensity after taking those measures.

Your healthcare team can use this pain record to identify hidden patterns and customize your pain management.

Sample Pain Record

Date	Time	Pain Description	Pain Intensity	Action Taken	Pain After The Action
Sept 8 th	9:30 am	Sharp pain in calf	2	Used ice pack	0
Sep 9 th	11:15 am	Prickling in right shoulder	4	Took paracetamol	1
Sep 10 th	5:45 pm	Shooting pain in feet	7	Used pain killer	2

Pain Management Methods

Pain management ideally starts with the belief that the patient doesn't have to endure this distress. Once this belief sets in, one can actively start exploring pain management options.

The most ideal scenario of pain management is to stop it before it starts. If this can't be done then the next best thing is to keep it from getting worse for the patients.





There are multiple methods that our team uses to help cancer patients manage their pain better.

- **Pain Medication**



Medicines is the most obvious method to manage pain. Our pain management specialists prescribe over the counter medicines to cancer patients who complain of mild or moderate pain. The patient is then constantly monitored for symptoms or side effects and the medicines are titrated based on his or her condition.

The pain specialist may further prescribe NSAIDs or Opioids for moderate to severe pain.

We also insist cancer patients to not take any OTC painkillers without consulting their doctor. The pain medication is usually prescribed based on the tolerance levels, physical dependence, and addiction possibilities of the patients.

Our clinical team administers pain medication to the cancer patient at home by mouth, injections, skin patches, or rectal suppositories as directed by the onco-specialist.

- **Distraction**

Our experience shows that cancer patients tend to get relief from pain when they are mentally engaged into some activity that takes up all their focus. Activities like reading, listening to music, playing chess or board games, etc. are known to help patients deal with cancer pain.



This distraction method can be used to manage mild pain. In cases of chronic pain, distractions can offer relief for some period of time.

Our team works with the family caregivers to identify such distraction activities for the patient based on the pain records. We help them preempt the time when such distractions would be most useful.



- **Heat and Cold**



Heat is known to relieve soreness of muscles while cold can numb the pain. However, we recommend that patients check with their onco-specialist about the use of this method for pain relief if their treatment is ongoing. This method should also be avoided by people who have issues with blood circulation.

Our onco-skilled nurses help the family caregivers learn the heat and cold technique for pain relief. The nurses train them on when to use this technique, the duration of heat and cold, the pressure to be used, etc.

- **Visualization**



Pain often causes a lot of psychological distress to the patient. This can lead to sleep disturbances and anxiety. In certain cases, we use visualization techniques for pain relief. Under this, the patient is encouraged to conjure up certain visuals in their mind.

These visuals can be about a place, activity, person – essentially anything that triggers a happy emotional response. This can offer momentary relief to the patient especially when they lack physical mobility.

- **Massage**

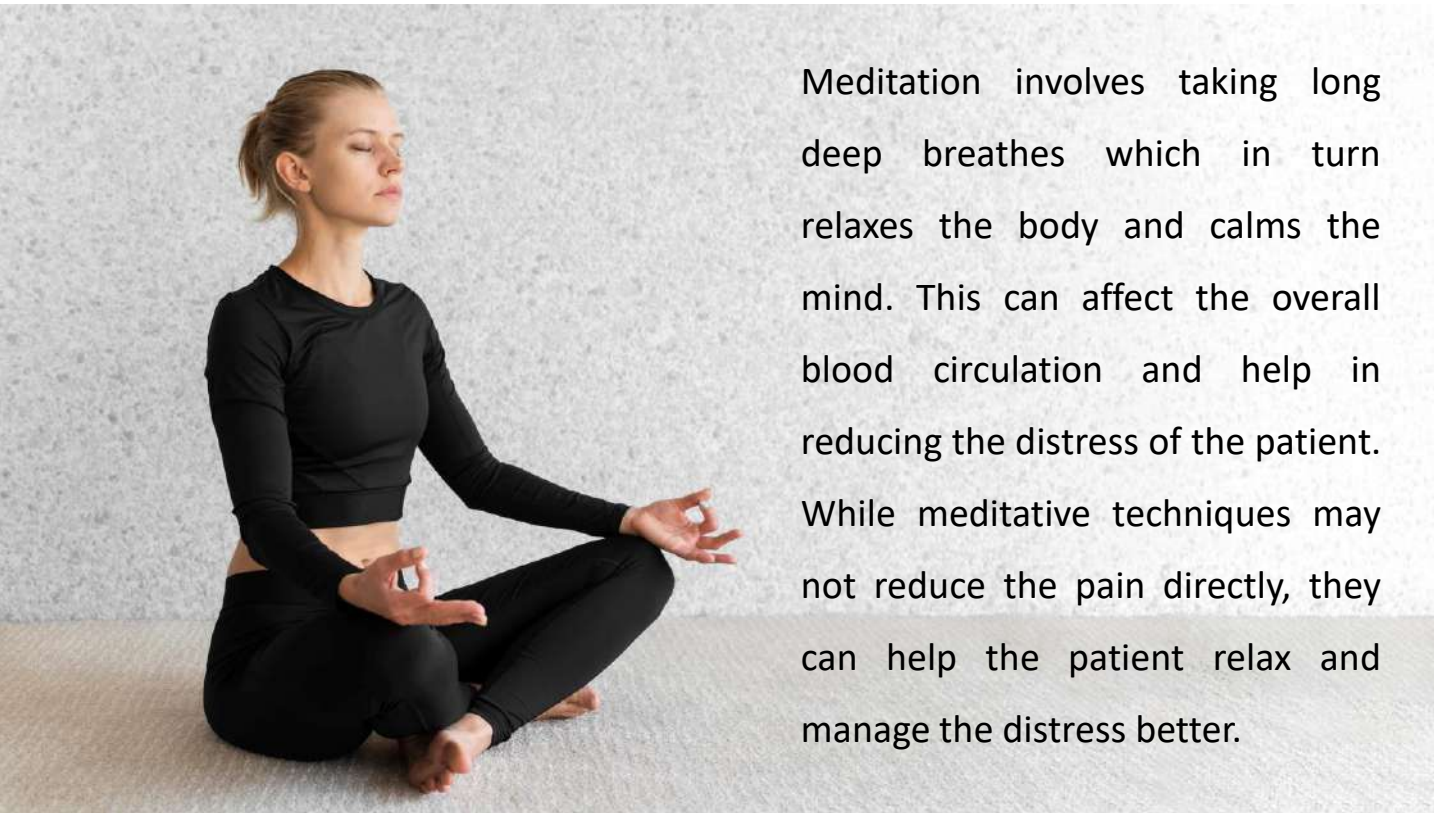
Physical massage around the pain area is known to offer relief. The kneading, pressing, rubbing actions involved in the massage also help improve the blood circulation within the body which can further reduce pain. Massage can also help relieve stress and anxiety of the patient.



Check with your pain specialist or clinical team to find out what kind of massage and pressure should be used for pain relief.



- **Meditation**



Meditation involves taking long deep breathes which in turn relaxes the body and calms the mind. This can affect the overall blood circulation and help in reducing the distress of the patient. While meditative techniques may not reduce the pain directly, they can help the patient relax and manage the distress better.

Pain Management Plan

Since each cancer patient experiences pain in a different way, it is imperative that the pain management plan should also be different for each patient.

At Ubiqare, our pain management specialist works with each individual patient and their family to create a plan that is customized to their pain type, intensity, stage of the illness, lifestyle, etc. The specialist then monitors the patient regularly to make sure that the plan is working as intended. The plan is then modified as and when needed depending on the patient's condition.



Common Scenarios Under Which Our Pain Specialist Modifies Pain Control Plan

- If the pain is getting worse
- If the patient experiences side effects of pain medication
- The duration of relief from pain medication is decreasing
- The pain medication schedule is not working

In addition to these, there may be scenarios unique to a patient which may require the pain specialist to modify the pain control plan.

We also advise cancer patients to engage in an honest and consistent dialogue with the pain management team. The more the pain specialist knows about the condition of the patient the more they would be able to help.

The success of the pain management plan also depends a great deal on compliance. The patient needs to adhere to the plan designed for them. Lapses in medication schedule, skipping doses, or stopping medication due to side effects can cause total failure of the plan.

To know more about cancer pain management
or pain control plan

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