

Managing Pain from Metastatic Breast Cancer



Pain is one common symptom of metastatic breast cancer (MBC) that can have a big impact on your everyday life. It can be difficult to describe exactly what you're feeling and get the appropriate care, however, there are things that can be done to help alleviate pain. This tip sheet will help you talk about and help manage pain with your treatment team.



TIP #1: SPEAK UP

- Speaking with your health care team about your pain is an important part of your overall care. You are the expert when it comes to describing and evaluating the severity of your pain and its impact on your quality of life. Maybe you think pain is unavoidable and can't be helped, but this isn't true. You should feel empowered to speak up about your pain, especially in conversations with your treatment team. Here's why:
 - Even mild pain can affect your quality of life.¹
 - Pain can be treated.²
 - It's easier to manage pain when you start early, before it becomes severe.
- If you're experiencing any pain, let your treatment team know as soon as possible.



TIP #2: LEARN TO DESCRIBE WHAT YOU'RE FEELING

- To understand what's causing the pain and how to treat it, your doctor may have several questions for you. Because pain can be hard to pinpoint and describe, it may be helpful to think about these things in advance:¹
 - Where the pain is located
 - What the pain feels like (dull, sharp, burning, throbbing, tingling, pinching, stabbing)
 - How long the pain has lasted
 - How intense the pain is on a scale of 1-10
 - If anything makes it better or worse
 - If it prevents you from sleeping or gets in the way of daily activities
- Consider keeping a journal that tracks your pain and bring it to each doctor's appointment. In your journal you can record:³
 - Any activities or times of day when your pain is better or worse
 - Every time you take pain medicine (if you are taking any), including the name of the medicine and dose
 - How much the medicine helps and how long it helps you
 - Any side effects you are experiencing



TIP #3: DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK QUESTIONS

- Get the most out of your time with the doctor by asking questions that can help you manage pain in between visits. Some questions to ask include:¹
 - Are there any side effects with the pain medicine you prescribed?
 - What can I do if pain medicine does not work or control my pain?
 - What are my other options for pain control?
 - Am I eligible to participate in any clinical trials?
- Make it a point to talk about your overall quality of life, including pain, at every doctor's visit. This may help you and your treatment team find better ways to manage your quality of life, if needed.¹



TIP #4: BE PROACTIVE ABOUT PALLIATIVE CARE AT THE START OF TREATMENT

- Palliative care (pronounced pal-ee-uh-tiv) – which is specialized care focused on improving quality of life for people living with serious, chronic illnesses – can help you with the symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatment, including pain.⁴ Palliative care has been shown to improve quality of life and survival.
 - Hospice care includes, but is different than, palliative care. Hospice is for helping individuals and their families prepare for end of life.
 - A palliative care specialist strives to preserve your quality of life or restore your quality of life and usually uses methods other than increasing opioids.
- Even doctors sometimes have this same misconception about palliative care, which can prevent them from recommending it to people who may benefit from it.³
- Ask about palliative care at the beginning of treatment, or when changing treatments. Don't wait for your doctor to bring it up – ask about a palliative care team that includes pain management specialists.¹
 - Having earlier discussions about palliative care has been associated with improved quality of life and even length of life.³



TIP #5: CONSIDER OTHER TREATMENT METHODS

- Aside from pain medicine, there are many other methods to help manage your pain. A few options to explore include:¹
 - Acupuncture
 - Counseling
 - Massage
 - Meditation, positive visualization and guided imagery
 - Yoga

References

1. <https://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/ManagementofPainRelatedtotheMetastaticBreastCancer.html>
2. https://www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/types/recur_metast/stop_treat/palliative/pain
3. <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/paincontrol.pdf>
4. [https://ww5.komen.org/KomenPerspectives/Komen-Perspectives---Palliative-Care-for-Breast-Cancer--Important-and-Often-Underused-\(March-2016\).html](https://ww5.komen.org/KomenPerspectives/Komen-Perspectives---Palliative-Care-for-Breast-Cancer--Important-and-Often-Underused-(March-2016).html)

