Good pain management improves quality of life. Managing pain to live life fully is possible! It is important that the treatment of your pain is based on your diagnosis, stage of disease, response to pain and treatments, and personal likes and dislikes. Pain can be safely managed at home in a partnership between you and your medical provider. Becoming knowledgeable about your pain and learning to advocate for yourself will help you and your medical provider address your pain in a way that works for you.

**Use pain medicines as prescribed**
If the prescription says to take the medicine at certain times or at certain time intervals (for example, every six hours), make sure this is done. Do not wait until the pain comes back to take the medicine. This will cause needless suffering.

One of the important ways that pain medicine works is that it helps to prevent episodes of severe pain. In order to do this, there has to be a certain amount of medicine in the blood. This is why the medical provider prescribes taking the medicine at regular intervals - to be sure that the amount in the blood level stays high enough.

**Medications for pain**
There are different types of pain medications to control pain at the end of life. Your medical provider will prescribe medication based on the type of pain you are experiencing. Pain medications include over the counter medications, prescription pain killers, prescription antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and finally barbiturates. Over the counter pain medications include aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, which can relieve mild to moderate pain.

When over the counter medications are no longer effective, your medical provider may consider an opioid, such as codeine, morphine, hydromorphone, fentanyl, or oxycodone which can be administered several ways. When combined with other medications such as antidepressants or anticonvulsants, these can be effective in treating nerve pain. Steroids such as prednisone help reduce inflammation, and work well with opioids.

Good communication with your hospice and palliative care team about pain relief from the medication is critical, as each person’s pain and response to medications is unique.
Common side effects of pain medications

All medications have possible side effects and before taking a specific medication, an individual should be aware of the possible side effects. Your hospice and palliative care team will educate you and your family about the medications prescribed to control your pain as well as the side effects of each medication.

Examples of side effects of over-the-counter medicines

**Acetaminophen may cause** *(Tylenol)*:
- Nausea
- Rash

**Anti-inflammatory drugs may cause** *(Advil, Motrin, & Aleve)*:
- Stomach upset, heartburn, and nausea *(taking the medicine with food may help prevent these problems)*
- Stomach ulcers and kidney problems *(with long-term use)*
- Allergic reaction *(rare)*

Examples of side effects of prescription medicines

**Anticonvulsant medicine may cause**:
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Confusion
- Skin rash

**Steroids may cause**:
- Nausea and vomiting
- Swelling of hands and feet
- Increased appetite
- Increased risk of infection

*Because of the chance of side effects, medical providers usually try to prescribe steroid medicines only for a short time.*

**Opiate pain relievers may cause**:
- Constipation
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, or feeling faint

* Drowsiness

* Nausea or vomiting

Managing Emotional and Spiritual Pain

In addition to medication, there are healthy ways to deal with emotions you might have when living with pain. Living with chronic pain can take a toll on your mood, outlook, relationships, and self-image. It may be important to seek help from a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, social worker, or your faith community leader. By getting additional emotional and spiritual support, you can learn new ‘life’ skills to become more effective at managing pain, including:

- Be patient with yourself.
- Ask your medical provider or loved one to connect you with a counselor, chaplain, or other professional to find the resources for emotional and spiritual support.
- Share your feelings with friends, family members, healthcare professionals, faith leaders, and others you respect.
- Talk with people who are or have been in a similar situation.
- Write about your feelings in a journal.
- Explore your faith and/or spiritual beliefs through readings or discussions with family members, friends, or faith leaders.
- Reflect on the role of faith and/or spirituality throughout your life and ways that you have found comfort in the past.

For more information visit caringinfo@nhpco.org or visit www.caringinfo.org/pain