

Eight Facts Everyone Should Know About Cancer Pain

By Wisconsin Cancer Pain Initiative

FEAR:

Cancer causes intolerable pain which cannot be relieved.

FACT:

Some patients with cancer never have pain. For those that do, cancer pain CAN be relieved.

FEAR:

Patients who use narcotics will become addicted.

FACT:

Patients who take narcotics for pain rarely, if ever, become addicted.

FEAR:

If strong medications like morphine are used too soon, they will not work later if the pain gets worse.

FACT:

Strong medications like morphine stay effective as long as they are needed. If pain increases, the medication dose can also be increased as much as needed.

FEAR:

Strong pain medications, such as narcotics, have unpleasant side effects.

FACT:

The most common side effects are feeling sleepy, nausea and constipation. Sleepiness and nausea go away after a few days. Simple treatments can control nausea and constipation.

FEAR:

Complaining about pain means you are not a "good" patient.

FACT:

Doctors and nurses must know about all of a patient's symptoms, including pain, in order to give good care.

FEAR:

Talking about pain will distract the doctor from working to treat the cancer.

FACT:

Pain relief is an important part of cancer care. Pain can interfere with sleep and rest, which are important to the body's ability to fight disease.

FEAR:

Pain means that the cancer is getting worse.

FACT:

Pain can be due to cancer or the effects of cancer treatment. Sometimes the pain is unrelated to the cancer.

FEAR:

"Shots" will be needed to control cancer pain.

FACT:

At least 90% of cancer pain can be effectively relieved by simple medications that are taken by mouth. Other treatments can help the rest. "Shots" are almost never necessary.

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