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[Pain: Additional Ways to Manage Pain](#) [1]

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Medication often plays an important role in relieving pain related to cancer and its treatment. But several medication-free self-care and support options are available. These methods are listed here. Or, learn about [treating cancer pain with medication](#) [3].

Self-care and support methods

Below are methods that have helped many people with cancer better manage their pain. These methods may also help reduce [stress](#) [4], [depression](#) [5], and [anxiety](#) [6] to help you cope with cancer.

Some of these methods you can do on your own. Others require you to work with a licensed or certified specialist. Talk with your doctor before trying methods other than those recommended by your health care team.

- **Acupuncture.** This ancient form of Chinese medicine involves inserting special needles into specific areas of the body. Some clinical trials have shown that it relieves pain. Make sure to see an experienced and reputable practitioner who only uses sterile needles.
- **Biofeedback.** This technique helps you control your body's functions, such as your heart rate. Painless sensors are attached to your skin to gather information about your body's processes. A trained biofeedback therapist then uses this information to help you focus on making small changes or adjustments to your body to get the results you want—such as relaxing specific muscles to reduce pain.

- **Breathing exercises/meditation.** Gentle breathing exercises can enhance relaxation, reduce tension, and decrease pain. You can do them while sitting up in a chair and relaxing your arms gently at your side. Or you can do them while lying down in a reclining chair or bed. Try breathing in through your nose while you slowly count to three in your head. Then breathe out through your mouth, once again counting silently to three. Continue for five minutes, gradually working up to 20 minutes. You can also try meditation exercises. These include softly repeating a calming word or imagining breathing heat, coolness, or a feeling of relaxation in and out of areas of pain in your body.

- **Counseling and support groups.** Talk with a [trained counselor](#) [7] or attend [cancer support groups](#) [8] to learn about pain management techniques that have worked for others and that may work for you. Discussing concerns and getting support may also relieve some of the physical and emotional tension that often makes pain worse.

- **Distraction.** Certain activities can distract your mind from pain. These include:
 - Taking a warm bath

 - Reading a book

 - Watching television or a movie

 - Drawing

 - Doing needlework

 - Listening to music

 - Taking a short walk outdoors

- **Heat and cold.** Try applying hot or cold compresses, heating pads, or ice packs to aching, sore, or painful areas of the body to help decrease discomfort. Discuss this approach with your doctor and follow any special instructions, particularly during or after radiation therapy or chemotherapy. Start with short applications of five to 10 minutes at moderate temperatures. Do not apply heat or cold directly to:

- Bare or injured skin
- Areas that are numb
- Areas that have received recent radiation therapy

Wrap ice packs and compresses in a towel to protect the skin. And use heating pads over clothing, a sheet, or a towel. Experiment with temperatures to find a method that provides relief comfortably.

- **Imagery and visualization.** Many imagery techniques are useful for pain and discomfort associated with treatment. For example, the "magic glove" is a technique in which you imagine putting on a glove before getting a needle stick. Then you visualize that the glove protects your hand from the feeling of pain. Or you may benefit from simple visualization exercises in which you imagine a peaceful scene, replay a favorite memory, or create a mental picture of a healing light that takes pain away. A trained therapist can teach you different exercises to do at home.
- **Massage.** A qualified massage therapist who has experience working with people with cancer can provide gentle therapeutic massage. This may help alleviate tension, discomfort, and pain. A caregiver can do simple massage techniques at home, including gentle, smooth, circular rubbing of the feet, hands, or back. You can also massage yourself by applying light, even pressure to your hands, arms, neck, and forehead.
- **Nutritional support.** Cancer and cancer treatments sometimes cause side effects, such as [mouth sores](#) [9] or [nausea](#) [10], that make it difficult to maintain proper nutrition. Not getting enough vitamins, minerals, and other important nutrients from food can cause pain or discomfort or worsen these sensations. A food and nutrition professional or your doctor may recommend you take certain supplements or change your diet to address those side effects.
- **Physical therapy or occupational therapy.** A [physical therapist](#) [11] evaluates nerve, muscle, and fitness problems that make it difficult for a person to function well on a daily basis. He or she can teach you how to relieve pain using simple exercises, or sometimes with devices, such as artificial body parts, splints, or braces. An occupational therapist helps people prevent and live with illness, injury, and disability. For example, an occupational therapist may help someone avoid [lymphedema](#) [12], which is a painful buildup of fluid, after cancer surgery.

Tracking pain reduction

Track the results of your pain management techniques to determine which ones work best for you. You can do this by creating a simple chart and listing the days of the week across the top. Down the left-hand side, create categories such as time of day, pain management techniques, activity level, and mood. You may want to include a pain rating category where you can enter a pain rating of zero to 10, with 10 being the highest level of pain.

By entering information regularly and reviewing the chart, you will be able to see which situations and techniques help your pain the most. You can find a premade chart by searching the Internet for “pain management chart” or “pain tracking chart.”

More Information

[Pain: Causes and Diagnosis](#) [13]

[ASCO Answers: Managing Pain](#) [14]

[About Complementary and Alternative Therapies](#) [15]

[Evaluating Complementary and Alternative Therapies](#) [16]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/pain-additional-ways-manage-pain>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24585>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/managing-stress>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/depression>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/anxiety>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25051>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25052>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31866>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25250>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25259>

[14] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_pain.pdf

[15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25038>

[16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25041>