

## Key points to remember about pain control:

- The goal is pain control while maintaining quality of life.
- Pain control requires the right medication or treatment in the right way, and at the right time.
- Pain control may require some time to find the right combination of medication and treatment.
- Some people may experience pain which has a combination of physical, social, psychological, cultural and spiritual sources. This is referred to as *total pain*.

For more information please contact your Palliative Care Staff

Or

Canadian Virtual Hospice  
Website at:  
[www.virtualhospice.ca](http://www.virtualhospice.ca)

Other Palliative Care brochures:

- **Palliative Care Program**
- **Food and Fluids at End of Life**
- **Understanding Your Grief**
- **What to Expect at the End of Life**

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# Pain Control at the End of Life

Palliative Care Program

*There is no road map  
for this journey.  
Every person's life  
and death is unique.*

## **What is Pain?**

“Pain is whatever the person says it is, existing wherever they say it does.” To relieve pain, we must realize that pain is real and unique for each person.

The goal is pain relief while maintaining quality of life. Medication is one method of treating pain. Individuals and their family may have concerns about the use of pain relief medication.

This pamphlet will discuss the most common concerns expressed about pain relief medications.

### **“If I start taking medication now, what will happen if the pain gets worse?”**

There are many pain relief medications that are available in many different strengths. The Health Care Team will work with you to determine the medication and the strength that you require for pain relief.

### **“Does this mean the end?”**

Starting on pain relief medication or increasing the dose does not mean the “end” is in sight. Pain relief medication does not slow down or speed up the disease process.

## **Addiction:**

The purpose of medication taken at regular intervals is to maintain comfort. When opioids are used for pain control addiction does not happen. Addiction is when there is an overwhelming preoccupation of obtaining more medication, without any medical need for it.

The body does become more used to the medication, which will mean the dose will need to be increased, to have the same desired effect however this is not addiction—it is called tolerance.

**Tolerance:** Often as pain increases there is a need for an increase in medication. This does not mean that the medication is no longer effective. This is a normal physical response in which increasing doses of pain medication are required over time to produce the same effect.

## **Adjustment:**

Sometimes people feel tired after obtaining pain relief because their bodies are exhausted from fighting the pain. This usually subsides in a few days as the body adjusts to the medication.

## **Common concerns associated with pain relief medication are:**

### **Drowsiness:**

When starting pain relief medication or changing the dosage, drowsiness may occur in the first 48-72 hours. If the drowsiness does not lessen, contact your physician.

### **Nausea:**

Pain relief medication may cause nausea. Medications are available to treat the nausea.

### **Constipation:**

Constipation is commonly associated with pain relief medication. Encourage fluids, a high fibre diet with fresh fruit and encourage activity for maintaining regular bowel movements. Laxatives, suppositories and other bowel medications should be added to prevent and or treat constipation.

### **Hallucinations:**

Hallucinations can occur in a small number of people taking pain relief medication. The medication may need to be changed or adjusted if the hallucinations do not subside in a few days.