



## Treating Breakthrough Cancer Pain

(NAPS)—More than 800,000 cancer patients in the U.S. suffer from a little-known and debilitating condition called breakthrough cancer pain. Breakthrough cancer pain is a flare-up of pain, moderate to severe in intensity, which can last from 30 minutes to three hours. The pain can be spontaneous and unprompted or brought on by an action as simple as swallowing, coughing or moving. This pain occurs even when the patient is receiving medication at regular intervals for their persistent cancer pain.

Although breakthrough cancer pain differs from person to person, most patients say that it comes on quickly, is intense, can begin in as little as 5 minutes and can last as long as three hours. Due to its rapid onset and severity, breakthrough cancer pain can and does prohibit patients from taking an active role in their daily lives and reduces overall quality of life.

Breakthrough cancer pain usually is treated using strong prescription medicines, called opioids, the same type of medications used to treat persistent pain. Traditional treatments have involved immediate release, potent medicines that were taken as needed with the goal of obtaining pain relief as quickly as possible. Research has shown that breakthrough cancer pain is best treated with “short-acting” medicines that work for brief periods and provide patients with pain relief quickly with limited and manageable side effects.

If left untreated, breakthrough cancer pain can significantly impact a person’s life. People with cancer say that breakthrough pain limits their activities, interferes with their work and hobbies, and affects their sleep and appetite. They can also become

**Breakthrough cancer pain is a flare-up of moderate to severe pain, which can last from 30 minutes to three hours, that occurs even when a patient is receiving medication at regular intervals for persistent cancer pain. Uncontrolled pain can make you feel:**

- Tired
- Depressed
- Angry
- Worried
- Lonely
- Overly stressed

**Uncontrolled pain can affect your life by interfering with:**

- Daily activities
- Work and hobbies
- Sleep
- Appetite



tired, depressed, angry, worried, and overly stressed.

A challenge to effective breakthrough cancer pain treatment is a bias that exists on the part of patients to discuss and address cancer pain. Patients often mistakenly believe that pain management will distract the physician from treating the cancer itself, that asking for pain medication is an admission of weakness and that the side effects of potent pain relievers will be intolerable. These beliefs are not true.

Breakthrough cancer pain is a serious issue in cancer treatment that requires particular attention from physicians and other health-care professionals to improve the quality-of-life of patients. The first and best step in proper pain management is open communication between patients and their doctors. When breakthrough pain is treated, it helps a person feel stronger and able to better cope with their cancer.

To learn more about cancer and breakthrough cancer pain visit [www.cancer-pain.org](http://www.cancer-pain.org).