

Managing Muscle & Joint Pain

Why Does Muscle and Joint Pain Happen?

Cancer treatments—including chemotherapy, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, and targeted therapies—can affect muscles, bones, and connective tissues. These treatments may cause inflammation, stiffness, or soreness. While uncomfortable, these side effects are common and often manageable with the right strategies.

Everyday Strategies to Reduce Pain

Gentle Movement & Stretching

Staying active helps prevent stiffness and improves circulation.

- Try **walking, gentle yoga, or light stretching** for 10–20 minutes a day.
- Move joints slowly through their full range to reduce stiffness.
- Avoid heavy lifting or high-impact exercise unless cleared by your care team.

Heat & Cold Therapy

Both can ease pain—use whichever feels best.

- **Heat:** warm showers, heating pads, or warm compresses relax tight muscles.
- **Cold:** ice packs reduce inflammation and sharp pain.

Always protect your skin with a towel and limit to 15–20 minutes at a time.

Hydration & Nutrition

Muscles and joints function best when well-hydrated.

- Drink water regularly throughout the day.
- Include anti-inflammatory foods such as berries, leafy greens, fish, nuts, and whole grains.
- Ask your clinician if magnesium or vitamin D supplementation is appropriate.

Massage & Physical Therapy

- Gentle self-massage or professional massage (approved by your doctor) may ease stiffness.
- A physical therapist can teach exercises that increase strength and reduce pain.

Medications That May Help

Non-prescription Options

- Acetaminophen
- NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen) — only if approved by your oncology team

Prescription Options

Your provider may recommend:

- Muscle relaxants
- Low-dose steroids
- Neuropathic pain medications (gabapentin, pregabalin, duloxetine)
- Topical creams (lidocaine, diclofenac)

Never start a new medication without discussing it with your cancer care team.

For more information and helpful videos, visit echoassociates.org/education



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Lifestyle Habits That Support Comfort

Prioritize Rest

Fatigue can worsen pain. Short naps, good sleep hygiene, and pacing activities throughout the day can help.

Maintain Good Posture

Try supportive chairs, lumbar cushions, or workstation adjustments to reduce strain.

Warm-Up Before Activities

Gentle movements before daily tasks can reduce flare-ups.

When to Call Your Care Team

Contact your ECHO provider if you experience:

- Sudden or severe pain
- Swelling, redness, or warmth in a joint
- Weakness that affects walking or daily tasks
- Fever with muscle aches
- Pain that interferes with sleep or routine activities

Prompt evaluation helps rule out infection, blood clots, or medication side effects.

Working With Your ECHO Oncology Team

Muscle and joint pain can be a frustrating part of treatment, but many options exist to help you feel better and stay active. Your care team can:

- Adjust your cancer treatment schedule
- Modify doses or medications
- Refer you to physical therapy or oncology rehabilitation
- Suggest integrative therapies (acupuncture, mindfulness-based stress reduction, etc.)

Always reach out if your pain is worsening or not improving—there are effective strategies our care team can use to support you. You are not alone.