Arthralgias and Myalgias (Joint or Muscle Pain)

What is it?

Arthralgia is joint pain. Myalgia is muscle pain. Both can be a possible side effect of some chemotherapies, some hormonal therapy agents, growth factors, or a very high white blood cell count. Chemotherapy related pain commonly occurs within two to three days of treatment and resolves within four to seven days. Pain associated with hormonal therapy may last longer because hormonal therapy is generally prescribed for long periods of time. Pain associated with growth factors occurs because the bone marrow is “packed” with newly growing cells and, in some types of leukemia, the white blood cell count can get very high, leading to similar pain.

Arthralgia pain is similar to arthritis, morning stiffness, may occur in multiple joints at different times, commonly occurs in the joints within the arms, wrists, knees, feet, pelvic and hip bones or back.

Myalgia is pain or aching within the muscle.

Management

Management of myalgias and arthralgias involves both pain control and lifestyle changes. The following self-care activities may help to minimize your discomfort:

- Strive for moderate daily exercise: walking, swimming, water exercise, or gardening will keep your muscles and joints moving. Avoid exercise that stresses your muscles and joints such as running, aerobics, tennis, or contact sports.
- Warm showers and hot packs applied to the joint or muscle may relieve pain.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprophen (Advil, Aleve) are very effective in relieving myalgia and arthralgia discomfort. Check with your provider before taking any over the counter medications.
- Physiotherapy or massage therapy may be prescribed.
- Prescription anti-inflammatory medications may be prescribed.

When to contact your care team

If you experience muscle or joint pain that cannot be controlled with self-care measures, speak to your care provider. It is very important that you continue taking your prescribed medications even if you believe your pain to be caused by these medications.

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