

# BONE METASTASIS

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## WHAT TO EXPECT

When cancer spreads from one area of your body to your bones, it is called bone metastasis. Cancer that starts in the breast, lungs, bladder, prostate or thyroid gland is more likely to spread to your bones than cancer that begins in other areas. The cancer cells travel through your blood or lymph nodes and go to one or more of your bones. When this happens, the cells can grow into a new tumor and destroy the bone. Cancer that spreads to your bones can be more painful than cancer that spreads to other organs.

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## WHAT PROBLEMS COULD I ENCOUNTER?

### FRACTURES

With bone metastasis, bones are weak and can crack or break (fracture) easily. Bones in your arms, legs and spine are most often fractured when you have bone metastasis.

- General signs of a fracture include increased pain at the fracture site, grating or crunching sounds with movement and redness or warmth of the skin over the affected area
  - Signs of arm or leg fracture include difficulty moving the arm or leg, inability to put weight on the arm or leg and/or inability to straighten the arm or leg
  - Signs of vertebral fracture include weakness, heaviness or numbness of the arms and legs, difficulty moving an arm or leg, loss of bowel and/or bladder control
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## HOW CAN I AVOID FRACTURES?

- Avoid lifting, holding, carrying, pulling or pushing heavy items
  - Avoid activities that put pressure on affected bones
  - Maintain good posture; wear shoes that support your feet
  - Watch for hazards such as wet walkways or uneven ground
  - Eliminate safety hazards in your home that could cause a fall; keep walkways clear, eliminate throw rugs, use a shower chair, etc.
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## NECK PROBLEMS

Nerve damage can occur if the tumor grows in the bones of your spine. This can make your arms and legs weak and/or hard to move. Loss of some or all of the feeling in parts of your body is also possible.

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## PAIN

At first, your pain may come and go, and the pain may be mild or severe. Over time, you may have mild pain that does not go away and times of severe pain. The pain can be in one area or you may feel it in many areas. It may hurt to move your arms and legs or even to cough.

The pain may be dull or aching and is usually felt at night. It may decrease during exercise or other physical activity. When bone pain increases with activity, it may be a sign that your bone is very weak and may soon break.

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## HOW CAN EXTERNAL BEAM RADIATION THERAPY HELP?

It is possible that external beam radiation therapy would help stop cancer from spreading further and may decrease pain caused by bone metastasis. This treatment may be done after surgery to decrease pressure on nerves caused by cancer that has spread to your spine. It may also be done after surgery to repair bones or make them more stable.

Radiation therapy after surgery can help prevent more surgery and may help you be more active. Your pain may decrease or go away within a few days or it may take two weeks or longer for the pain to decrease or go away.

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## WHEN SHOULD I ASK FOR IMMEDIATE HELP?

You have fallen and your arm, leg or another part of your body is swollen, painful or does not look the same as it did before

You suddenly feel lightheaded and have trouble breathing

You have new and sudden chest pain or have more pain when you take deep breaths or cough; you may also cough up blood

Your arm or leg feels warm, tender and painful; it may look swollen and red

You experience numbness, tingling or lose bladder control

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## AFTER HOURS

If you need immediate emergency medical attention, please dial 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. All other medical attention outside of the Center's regular office hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday) will be answered by our telephone answering service will have a doctor from Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center return your call.

**Hammond:** (985) 542-5000

**Gonzales:** (225) 644-1205

**Baton Rouge:** (225) 767-0847

**Covington:** (985) 875-2234

**Houma:** (985) 876-9045