

Describing Pain to Your Healthcare Professional

Describing your pain accurately and thoroughly will help your healthcare professional find the cause of the pain and treat it.

Remember that many people experience this kind of pain and it's okay – and often normal - to feel this way, but it is important not to “tough it out” and to talk to your healthcare professional about your pain. Telling the story of how you experience your pain, your thoughts about your pain, and what your goals are is very important and you should be prepared for questions and to be able to accurately describe your pain.

Remember that physical pain is influenced by many factors and being physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy helps you to recover more quickly.

Information that is helpful to describe to your healthcare professional:

- How long you have had your pain
- Where you feel the pain
- Whether your pain is in one spot or spread out
- How the pain feels and how severe it is
- Whether pain is constant or comes and goes
- What activities make pain worse or improve it
- How your pain limits what you can do
- How often the pain occurs and how long it lasts
- Anything that triggers the pain
- The types of things you like to do
- The types of things that work best for you to manage your pain
- The activities that you would like to be able to do that are limited by your pain

Keep a Pain Diary

Keeping a pain diary or record of your pain is a good way to track your pain triggers and symptoms over time. Be as specific as possible. The most helpful information to track includes:

- Daily activities
- Food and beverages
- Medications and supplements
- Pain rating
- Related symptoms

- Emotions and thoughts during, before, and after pain flare-ups
- The times your pain gets better and worse; for example, is it worse first thing in the morning when you wake up? Does it get better or worse after certain food or medications?

Some words that can help you describe the way your pain feels include:

- Aching
- Burning
- Cramping
- Dull
- Fearful
- Gnawing
- Heavy
- Hot or burning
- Sharp
- Shooting
- Sickening
- Splitting
- Stabbing
- Punishing or cruel
- Radiating
- Tender
- Throbbing
- Tiring or exhausting

Examples of a pain diary are [here](#) and [here](#).

Understand the Pain Scale

The intensity of your pain and the degree of discomfort are crucial for your healthcare professional to know. A pain scale is a valuable tool that measures your perception of pain on a scale of 0 to 10. Think about your pain and see if you can rate it based on the following scale:

- 1 to 3: Mild and minor pain that's noticeable and possibly distracting
- 4 to 6: Moderate to moderately strong pain that's enough to disrupt your normal daily activities.
- 7 to 10: Debilitating, intense pain that prevents you from living a normal life

Describe your Limitations

The way your pain limits your daily activities provides your pain management specialist with important information. Pain may prevent you from lifting things or bending in a certain direction. You may find yourself unable to stretch or bend certain parts of your body or have problems using your hands for things such as typing.

The more information and the more specific you can describe your symptoms and experiences, the easier it will be to identify treatment and management options that might work best for you.