

# What Is Pain?

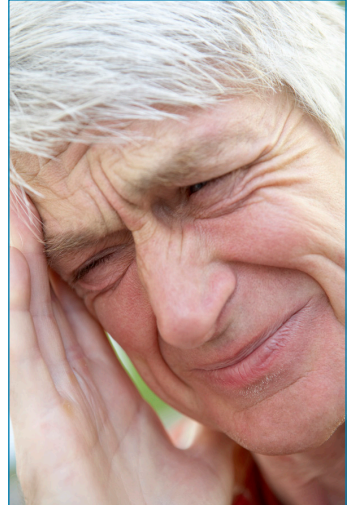
Pain is your awareness of hurt or discomfort and how you perceive it. This applies when you feel physical or emotional pain.

The feeling of physical pain starts in nerve receptor cells that are below your skin and in organs inside your body. These nerve cells send a signal to nerves in your spinal cord and from there to your brain.

Pain can be a sign that something is wrong, such as a skin injury, an infection, or an illness. It can range from a mild discomfort to pain that is extreme and severe.

Emotional pain is often described as distress, mental anguish, or a “broken heart.”

Physical pain and your emotions interact with each other. Your emotions have a direct impact on how you feel pain. You can use your emotions and your mind to help you manage pain.



*Pain can affect many aspects of your daily life.*

# Pain Facts

- About 75 million persons living in the U.S. have chronic or recurrent pain.
  - Pain affects more persons in the U.S. than diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined.
  - Pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care.
  - Chronic pain costs over \$100 billion dollars a year in medical costs, disability payments, lost productivity, and retraining workers.
-

# Types of Pain

## Acute Pain

This type of pain usually starts suddenly. It can range from mild to severe and is caused by another problem or event. Examples are:

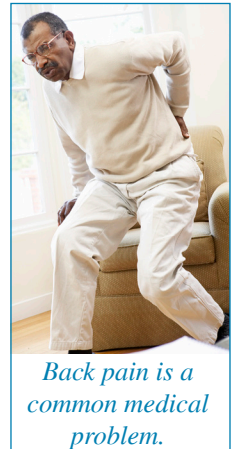
- A temporary illness, such as an earache, the flu, or a sore throat
- An injury, such as a broken bone, or a burn, a sprain or strain
- Surgery or other medical procedure
- Labor and delivery

When the cause of the pain is treated with success, the pain goes away.

## Chronic Pain

With this type, pain signals keep firing in the nervous system for weeks, months, or years. The pain can come and go or persist. It can range from mild to severe. The cause of chronic pain is not always known, but it may be due to or related to a number of reasons. These include:

- Arthritis
- Back problems
- Cancer or chemotherapy for cancer
- Headaches that persist
- Medical conditions that cause problems with nerve signals, such as diabetes and multiple sclerosis
- Other chronic health conditions, such as fibromyalgia and sickle cell anemia
- A past injury or illness



*Back pain is a common medical problem.*

Chronic pain can interfere with your daily activities and affect the way you eat, sleep, work, relate to others, and enjoy life in general. When you have chronic pain, it is common to be irritable, worried, angry, and depressed. Having chronic pain and depression increases the risk of suicide. The need to stop the pain can lead to:

- Unproven treatments that could be harmful
  - Overuse and/or addiction to pain relieving medicines. Drug use.
  - Repeated surgeries
-

# Identify and Be Able to Explain Your Pain

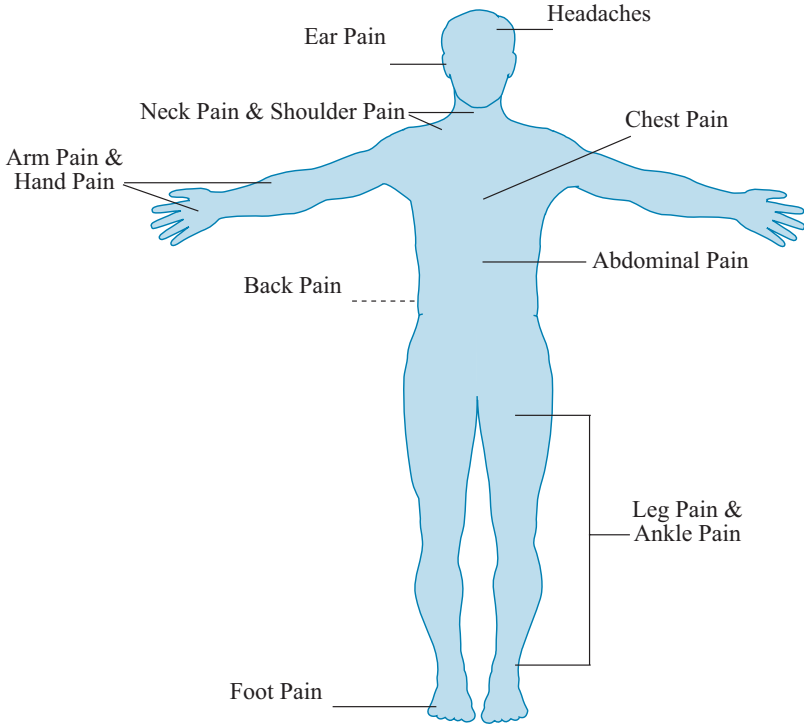
Answering the questions below will help you identify your pain and be able to explain it to your doctor or health care provider. See on next page in this guide allow you to answer these questions one at a time. Your answers also help you identify things that trigger your pain and how it affects your daily life. Make a copy of this chart. Take your answers with you to show your doctor or health care provider.

<i>Questions to Answer</i>	<i>Your Answer</i>
1. Where does it hurt?	
2. How much does it hurt?	
3. When did the pain first start?	
4. How long have you had it?	
5. Does it last all the time or does it come and go?	
6. Does it occur with any other problems or symptoms?	
7. What makes the pain worse?	
8. What medicines have you taken to relieve the pain?	
9. What treatments other than medicines have you used?	
10. How has the pain affected your life?	

---

# 1. Where does it hurt?

Circle areas of the body and/or place a check mark (✓) in the boxes showing where you have pain.



- |                                      |                                    |                                  |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Head        | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrist(s)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Abdomen | <input type="checkbox"/> Ankle(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neck        | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand(s)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Groin   | <input type="checkbox"/> Foot     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shoulder(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Finger(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hip(s)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Toe(s)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arm(s)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Back      | <input type="checkbox"/> Leg(s)  | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elbow(s)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Chest     | <input type="checkbox"/> Knee(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    |

# 2. Does it last all the time or does it come and go?

---

---

---






### 3. Can you explain the pain?

To help explain your pain, check off any of the words listed below that describes what your pain feels like. After each word you check off, write a number for how much it hurts. Use the pain scale on next page.

<b>Word to Explain the Pain</b>	<b>How Much It Hurts</b> <b>1 (mild) → 10 (severe)</b> <b>(See on next page.)</b>	<b>Words to Explain the Pain</b>	<b>How Much it Hurts</b> <b>1 (mild) → 10 (severe)</b> <b>(See on next page.)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Aching		<input type="checkbox"/> Agonizing	
<input type="checkbox"/> All over		<input type="checkbox"/> Annoying	
<input type="checkbox"/> Beating		<input type="checkbox"/> Burning	
<input type="checkbox"/> Comes and goes		<input type="checkbox"/> Cramping	
<input type="checkbox"/> Crushing		<input type="checkbox"/> Cutting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dull		<input type="checkbox"/> Excruciating	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gnawing		<input type="checkbox"/> Intense	
<input type="checkbox"/> Like menstrual cramps		<input type="checkbox"/> Local (what area of the body?)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-lasting		<input type="checkbox"/> Nagging	
<input type="checkbox"/> Penetrating		<input type="checkbox"/> Piercing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinching		<input type="checkbox"/> Pounding	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pressing		<input type="checkbox"/> Pricking	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pulsing		<input type="checkbox"/> Radiating	
<input type="checkbox"/> Scalding		<input type="checkbox"/> Sharp	
<input type="checkbox"/> Shooting		<input type="checkbox"/> Sore	
<input type="checkbox"/> Splitting		<input type="checkbox"/> Squeezing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stabbing		<input type="checkbox"/> Stinging	
<input type="checkbox"/> Suffocating		<input type="checkbox"/> Taut	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tearing		<input type="checkbox"/> Tender	
<input type="checkbox"/> Throbbing		<input type="checkbox"/> Tight	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tingling		<input type="checkbox"/> Wrenching	

## 4. How much does it hurt?

Pain scales are used to help you rate your pain. The higher the number, the stronger the pain. Using the faces and wording below, choose a number from 1 to 10 that describes your pain.

No Pain		Mild Pain		Moderate Pain		Severe Pain		Worst Pain		
										
<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
It does not hurt.		It hurts a little bit.		It hurts a little more.		It hurts even more.		It hurts a whole lot.		It hurts the worst.
		I can ignore the pain.		Keeps me from doing normal tasks		Keeps me from concentrating		Severely limits my activity		Can't do anything
Pain relievers are not needed.			Mild pain medicine relieves or lowers pain.			Prescribed, strongest to strongest medicine lowers or only partly lowers pain.				

## 5. When did the pain first start?

On \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Day of the week)      (Month)      (Day)      (Year)

## 6. How long have you had it?

\_\_\_\_\_ days    \_\_\_\_\_ weeks    \_\_\_\_\_ years

## 7. Does it occur with any other problems or symptoms?

List other symptoms you have with the pain:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 8. What makes the pain worse?

(Doing certain activities, sitting for too long, eating, not eating, heat, taking or not taking medicine, etc.)

---

---

## 9. What medicines have you taken to relieve the pain?

Over-the-Counter Medicines & Supplements (Pills, topical ointments, herbs, etc.)		
Name of Item	Amount	Used How Often?

Prescribed Medicines		
Name of medicine	Dose	Prescribed by:

## 10. What non-medicine treatments have you used?

---

---

## 11. How has the pain affected your life?

(Change in activity level, ability to work, change in mood, sleep habits, relationships, enjoying life, etc.)

---

---

---

# 25 Methods to Manage Pain

You have many options to manage pain. A brief summary of 25 methods is listed from A to Z on this page and the next 2 pages.

1. **Acupuncture.** A trained therapist inserts hair-thin needles at specific areas just below the skin (acupoints) to stimulate the body's self-healing abilities. Electroacupuncture adds wires to the needles to stimulate nerve endings. Some researchers believe this activates endorphins.
  2. **Biofeedback.** This is a process of learning how to control and change internal functions to manage pain and other conditions. Biofeedback devices measure your breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, or other functions. Through training in relaxation or imagery, you learn to alter bodily functions to feel more relaxed and to help manage pain.
  3. **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).** This helps a person identify and then modify thoughts and behaviors that focus on pain.
  4. **Cold treatment.** Examples are placing an ice pack, a bag of frozen vegetables, or a cold washcloth on the area that aches. Apply cold treatment for 20 minutes at a time. For pain from an acute injury, use cold treatment for the first 48 hours.
  5. **Counseling.** This can be individual, family, or group therapy that provides emotional support and teaches ways to identify and deal with stress and emotions that increase pain.
  6. **Dietary supplements.** Examples are capsaicin for arthritis pain and ginger to reduce inflammation. *Note:* Follow your doctor's advice for dietary supplements.
  7. **Distraction.** This focuses your attention on something other than the pain, such as watching a movie, working on a hobby or project, and helping others.
  8. **Electrical stimulation called TENS.** (This is transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation). This uses a device that sends gentle electrical impulses through the skin at certain pain sites of the body to block pain signals before they reach the brain.
-

9. **Endorphins.** These are painkilling proteins that occur naturally in the body. The word endorphin is a Greek term that means “the morphine within.” Brisk walking, running, and other aerobic exercises may release endorphins. The endorphins lower pain.
10. **Exercise.** Stretching and flexibility. These help with range of motion and reduce stiffness in joints that could lead to pain.
11. **Heat treatment.** Examples are a heat pack, a hot water bottle, a heating pad (set on low), or warm shower water on the area that hurts. Apply heat treatment for 20 minutes at a time. For pain from an acute injury, use heat treatment after using cold treatment for 48 hours.
12. **Hypnosis.** This uses refocusing techniques to block or transform pain.
13. **Massage.** This gives a temporary relief of pain due to muscle stiffness and muscle spasms.
14. **Medications – Over-the-counter (OTC)**
  - Oral pain relievers. Examples are acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen sodium. These also reduce fever and, except for acetaminophen, reduce swelling.
  - Topical cremes, lotions, ointments, and gels. These offer temporary relief for localized areas of pain, such as fingers and knees due to arthritis. Substances in these include menthol, eucalyptus, capsaicin, and salicylates.
15. **Medications – Prescribed**
  - Opioids. Examples are codeine, hydrocodone (Vicodin), meperidine (Demerol), morphine, and oxycodone (OxyContin).
  - Non-opioids. These include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), such as piroxicam (Feldene), naproxen, and nambumetone (Relafen). These are commonly prescribed for arthritis pain.
  - Adjuvants. These include antidepressants, anticonvulsants, antimigraine drugs, muscle relaxants, and corticosteroids. They may be prescribed along with other medications that relieve pain.
  - Local anesthetics

Prescribed medicines come in many forms. These include pills, liquids, skin patches, suppositories, and ones that are injected or infused. Pain medicine can also be given using a machine that you control. You push a button when you feel pain. It is set up so you can't get too much pain medicine. This is called Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA). Most often, it is used in the hospital and health care facilities.

---

16. **Occupational therapy.** This is learning how to do activities of daily living while managing pain.
17. **Physical therapy.** This focuses on improving mobility, flexibility, strength and endurance through physical exercises and assistive devices.
18. **Placebos.** These use the power of suggestion that a pill, etc., without actual medicine, will treat the pain because a person believes it will.
19. **Prayer.** This is a spiritual way to meditate, which helps to lower heart rate and decreases muscle tension. Connecting to a higher power is a way to cope with pain and deal with things that cannot be changed.
20. **Relaxation.** Examples are deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.
21. **Self-Soothing.** This is giving compassion and reassurance to yourself like when a mother soothes a child who is in pain or is distressed. It is giving yourself permission to accept the pain and trying to stay calm and relaxed, even in the midst of your pain. It also includes seeking physical comfort, such as taking a warm bath.
22. **Support groups.** These allow emotional support and a shared understanding for dealing with pain.
23. **Surgery.** This may be needed to correct a physical problem that causes pain.
24. **Tai Chi.** This form of exercise uses slow, gentle movements to improve balance and increase flexibility.
25. **Yoga.** This uses breathing exercises, postures, and movements to unite the body, mind, and spirit. It also improves blood pressure and circulation.



*The Arthritis Foundation  
recommends doing tai chi for  
pain relief.*