



Talking About Pain

Eight ‘LESS PAIN’ questions to discuss with your pharmacist when you are troubled by pain

Community pharmacists are often the first health care professionals who people in acute pain come into contact with, and one of the professional groups who individuals living with longer term pain are most likely to see regularly. The questions below are intended to support discussions about pain between pharmacy users and pharmacists. Thinking about them in advance of a pharmacy visit could, for example, permit better communication than would otherwise be the case.

Acute pain is by definition unpleasant. But experiencing it can also be vital, because it helps to prevent tissue damage and aid repair. However, in some cases it may progress into a persistent pain condition which brings with it no benefits. If inadequately treated, persistent (chronic) pain can for years needlessly undermine the quality of life of those affected by it.

It is therefore important to manage all types of pain well. Pain lasting for a period of over two to three months may be becoming a persistent pain condition. The eight broad ‘LESS PAIN’ questions below are not to be asked or answered in a rigid or narrow way. Rather, they outline a range of issues that it can be useful to talk about when considering pain related problems, given that each person is unique and needs to communicate her or his special needs as effectively as possible.

The eight ‘LESS PAIN’ Questions

- 1 Length?** Can you describe the pain you have, and say how long it has been troubling you?
- 2 Event?** Is this pain linked to any particular event or illness, or has it come ‘out of the blue’?
- 3 Severity?** How much pain are you in? If we thought of a scale in which zero was no pain and 10 was the worst pain imaginable, where would you place your pain?
- 4 Sensation?** Can you describe exactly how it feels and where it is – is it, for example, a stabbing pain in a specific place or would you say it is a more generalised sort of pain?

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- 5 **Prescription and over-the-counter medicines?** How have you tried to relieve it? Are you using medicines of any sort (prescribed, or that you have bought) and have you talked about your pain with your GP or any other health professional?
- 6 **Activity?** Is your pain stopping your normal activities, or perhaps even making you feel life is unbearable? For example, is it interfering with your sleep or your social life?
- 7 **Interventions?** Psychological treatments such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or alternatives such as meditation can be effective in changing pain thresholds. Are there any non-pharmaceutical treatments you wish to talk about or try?
- 8 **'Not mentioned' issues?** Is there anything else concerning you about your pain – anything you feel is important but may not be easy to talk about?

Resources

There are now many internet and other published resources for people living with pain. Examples include:

The Pain Toolkit <http://www.paintoolkit.org>

Overcoming Chronic Pain: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques.

Frances Cole, Hazel Howden-Leach, Helen Macdonald, Catherine Carus
(Constable and Robinson 2005)

Manage Your Pain.

Michael Nicholas, Allan Molloy, Lois Tonkin, Lee Beeston 3rd Ed (Harper Collins Australia 2011)

The **Talking About Pain** communication guide for community pharmacy users was written by James Davies, Dr Jennifer Gill, Dr Roger Knaggs and Professor David Taylor

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