



*A Hands On Approach for Pain Management:*  
Having an Open and Honest Conversation  
With Your Healthcare Professional About Pain

each person  
experiences pain differently



communicating  
with your doctor  
is the first step to  
improving your treatment



Chronic pain can be a complex medical condition to address, especially because each person experiences pain differently.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, it is important to communicate effectively with your healthcare professional who can work with you to develop a treatment plan that's right for you.

Remember that YOU are the only one who can tell your medical team what you are experiencing and how it affects your day-to-day life. Telling your story accurately and clearly is the first step to finding ways to improve your treatment.

The following tips may help you prepare and communicate effectively with your healthcare professional to make the most of your appointment.



## Prepare for Your Appointment

Arrive at medical appointments with an understanding of what you hope to accomplish during the visit. Most people would agree that health is more important than purchasing a car or going on vacation, so why do most people spend more time preparing for those events than for medical visits? Prepare for appointments with your healthcare professional as you would prepare for other important meetings.

### Educate yourself

Research topics such as treatment options and complementary techniques through trusted sources. Learn as much as you can so that your discussion with your healthcare professional can be as productive as possible.

### Make a list

Write down key points you want to talk about during your appointment.

### Plan ahead

Do you think you will need extra time for your appointment? When you schedule the appointment, ask how much time you'll have with your healthcare professional – if you need more time, ask for it in advance. Consider asking for the first or last appointment of the day so that you have the time you need.

### Think about the details

Only you know your pain story. Make sure you remember the details so you can describe it clearly. One way to do this is to keep track of the pain you experience in a notebook or pain diary. Take it to your medical appointment. This is a good way to help you remember details that you need your healthcare professional to know. You can find sample pain journals and other helpful tools at: [www.PartnersAgainstPain.com](http://www.PartnersAgainstPain.com)

### Practice talking with your healthcare professional

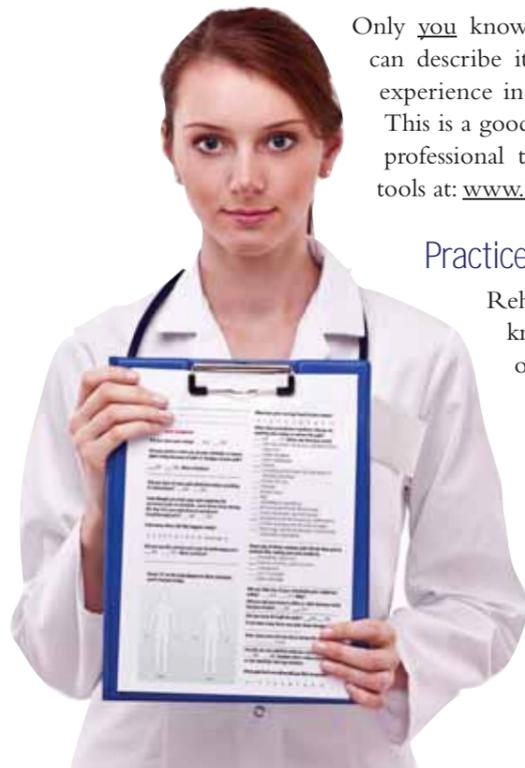
Rehearse with a friend, loved one, or caregiver who can listen and let you know if you are explaining your pain clearly. If your listeners suggest other ways to share your information, make changes and practice again.

### Gather background materials that may be helpful to your healthcare professional

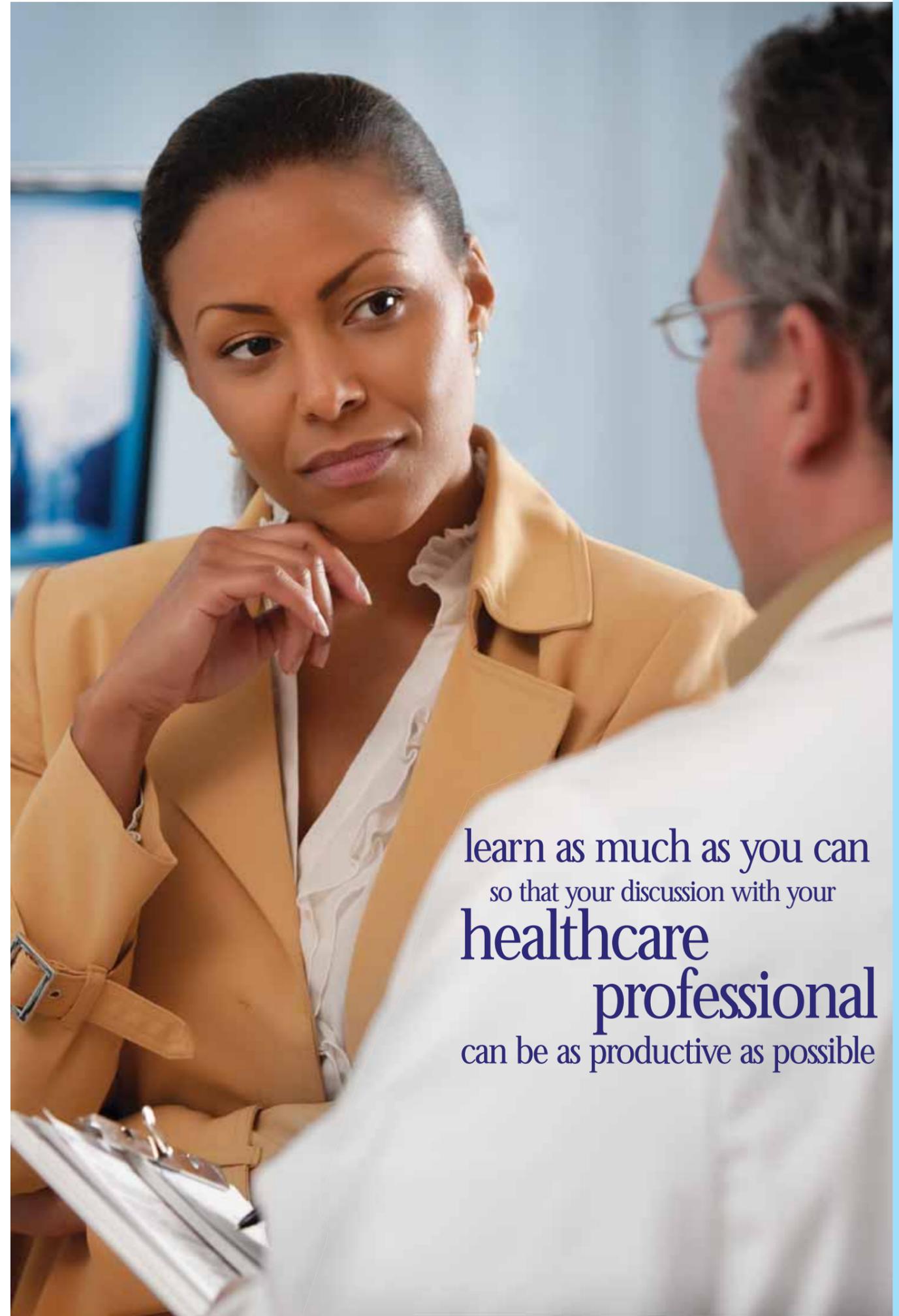
This may include past medical records, names, and contact information of other healthcare professionals who have treated you. Also give information on all the ways you try to reduce the pain – including a list of all prescription AND over-the-counter medicines you take. Remember to note how much and how often you take each medicine, as well as details about other things you may have tried for pain relief.

### Consider bringing a friend, loved one, or caregiver to the appointment

They can help listen and act as a “safety net” in case you forget to mention something. This person can also help you remember what your healthcare professional's advice is for your treatment plan and what you need to do next.



Keep a record of your pain experiences in a pain journal. You can download one at [www.PartnersAgainstPain.com](http://www.PartnersAgainstPain.com)



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## During the Appointment: Communicating About Pain

You've prepared for your appointment, kept a pain diary, researched your health condition, and practiced with a friend or family member. You're ready to tell your healthcare professional about how you've been feeling and about your experience with chronic pain. How do you make sure that you're communicating clearly, and that you understand what your healthcare professional is saying? The tips below can help you and your healthcare professional understand each other better.

### Establish goals

At the beginning of your appointment, clearly tell your healthcare professional everything you want to accomplish during your visit. This will help your healthcare professional manage your time together and to make sure you talk about all of your concerns. Don't wait until the end of the appointment to bring up an important point. Here are some examples of what this may sound like:

- ✓ *"I want to talk about how I can manage my pain to get back to doing certain activities. I'm open to hearing about different approaches that might work for me."*
- ✓ *"There are two main concerns I'd like to discuss. First, I am still feeling tired. Second, the pain in my lower back has improved somewhat, but is still bothering me."*

### Stay actively involved in the discussion

- ✓ If the conversation drifts to other topics, *build a bridge* back to your key points:
  - *"That's a really interesting thought. But can we go back to what I was saying earlier before we move on to this topic..."*
  - *"I want to come back to something I mentioned earlier..."*
- ✓ Maintain eye contact to show your healthcare professional that you are actively listening and engaged in the conversation.
- ✓ Ask questions. If something isn't clear, it's up to you to ask your healthcare professional to explain. If you need to hear it with different words or examples:
  - *"I'm not sure I understand what you just said. Can you explain that a different way?"*
  - *"Besides taking medicine, are there other things I can do to help the pain?"*
- ✓ Repeat treatment instructions back to your healthcare professional; use your own words and ask him or her if you are getting it right.
  - *"Let me stop you there. What I think you're saying is that I should..."*
  - *"I want to be sure we're on the same page. So what you're saying is I will need to do x, y, and z..."*

### Understand next steps and make sure you know what to do after the appointment

- ✓ Ask your healthcare professional what to do if your condition gets worse, or if you have other questions between now and your next appointment. Can you reach him or her on the phone or via email, or will you need to schedule another appointment?
- ✓ Ask for reading materials or other resources on pain management and on your condition. Does your healthcare professional know of websites or books that may be helpful to you?
- ✓ If the pain is not getting better, ask your healthcare professional for a referral to a pain specialist (a doctor who specializes in pain management).
- ✓ Be sure you know how to safely store and dispose of medicines. For example, some medicines need to be stored at a certain temperature or in a locked container. Visit [www.safeguardmy meds.org](http://www.safeguardmy meds.org) for more information.

# 54% of doctors surveyed want to know what the pain feels like



54% want to see  
a pain journal

71% want patients to tell them  
what they expect from treatment

## Frequent Questions About Treatments That You May Want to Ask Your Healthcare Professional

- Why are you prescribing this type of medicine?
- Are there side effects I should know about or watch for?
- How often should I take this medicine and what if I miss a dose?
- Are there any medicines I should not combine with this one, either prescription or over-the-counter?
- Should I consider other options beyond medicine for managing pain – combining it with techniques like yoga, acupuncture, or massage?
- What is the best way to store and dispose of the prescription medicines?

## What Healthcare Professionals Want to Know About Your Pain: Results From a National Survey

A new national survey indicated that people living with chronic pain and healthcare professionals may not be communicating as effectively as they think they are – and could be settling for less when it comes to pain management. Keep the following insights in mind as you prepare for your next appointment:

- The survey revealed that many patients don't take full measures to prepare for medical appointments, which is key to getting the most out of each medical appointment.
- Only 1 in 5 (19%) use a journal to track their pain experiences, and just 35% said they go online to learn about their condition.<sup>2</sup>
- Almost half (48%) don't make notes for discussion, and close to 10% do nothing at all to prepare for medical appointments.<sup>2</sup>
- Healthcare professionals wish patients would share more information with them, including their expectations for treatment (71%), how pain is affecting everyday life (68%), and what the pain feels like (54%). In fact, most healthcare professionals would like to see you bring a list of questions (67%) and a pain journal (54%) to a first appointment.<sup>3</sup>

68%  
want to know how  
pain affects daily living



A woman with blonde hair is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. Her hand is resting on her shoulder. The background is a soft, out-of-focus image of a healthcare professional in a white coat.

## Having an Honest Conversation

### About Chronic Pain

Below is a fictional conversation between a healthcare professional and a patient. Note what is done well in this two-way conversation.

**Healthcare professional:** So, Mrs. Smith, you're back for a follow-up appointment. How are you feeling?

**Patient:** Well, I'm still having trouble with the low back pain. I think the medicine has helped some, but it's still pretty bad.

**Healthcare professional:** OK – first tell me about the pain.

**Patient:** I have been experiencing burning pain in my lower back, mostly in the mornings. When I look back at my pain journal entries, it's been stuck at about a seven on a scale from 1 to 10.

**Healthcare professional:** According to my notes from our last visit, you said it was a nine, so it appears the pain has improved slightly. Is that accurate?

**Patient:** Yes. But I'm still in too much pain to do anything in the morning. I want to manage that pain.

**Healthcare professional:** OK, I understand what you're saying and I want to help you. There are other medicines and approaches that you can try that I'm happy to discuss with you.

**Patient:** OK. A friend also told me that acupuncture can work for pain – what do you think?

**Healthcare professional:** Some people have found success with that, I have an acupuncturist that I can refer you to. This could take some time, so you need to talk to the acupuncturist and find out what kind of schedule of appointments would be best in your circumstances. Your insurance may cover this, so look into that. I also have another medicine that I think may work better for you.

**Patient:** Let me make sure I understand you. I will make an appointment with the acupuncturist and likely have to go at least several times before we find out if it'll work for me, and I'll try a new medicine that may help my pain.

**Healthcare professional:** Yes, that is correct. I will write out the prescription for you with details on how to take the new medication. Make another appointment in six weeks to let me know how the plan is working for you. If you have questions, call the office and leave information on how I can get back to you.

**Patient:** Ok, thanks. See you again in a few weeks.

## References

1. National Institute of Health. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. *Pain: Hope Through Research*. Office of Communications and Public Liaison, 3 Aug. 2009. Web. [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/chronic\\_pain/detail\\_chronic\\_pain.htm#125193084](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/chronic_pain/detail_chronic_pain.htm#125193084). Accessed August 4, 2011.
2. *Hands On Approach for Pain Management* survey, patient data set.
3. *Hands On Approach for Pain Management* survey, healthcare professional data set.



Since 1993, leading efforts to advance standards of pain care through education and advocacy.

### What Is Partners Against Pain®?

In 1993, to raise awareness of the importance of pain management, Purdue Pharma L.P. established Partners Against Pain® – an alliance of patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers dedicated to pain management education and advocacy. Whether you are suffering from chronic pain or caring for a loved one battling this condition, [PartnersAgainstPain.com](http://PartnersAgainstPain.com) offers information, support, and practical advice. Our goal is to encourage partnership – to provide the tools and resources that will help patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals better understand and communicate about this condition. It's a complicated issue. Treating pain requires patience, appropriate therapy, medical supervision, and – perhaps most importantly – a common language and understanding. Every day, millions of Americans suffer from chronic, untreated pain. Pain may be inescapable, but proper pain management should be every patient's right.

Learn more at [PartnersAgainstPain.com](http://PartnersAgainstPain.com)