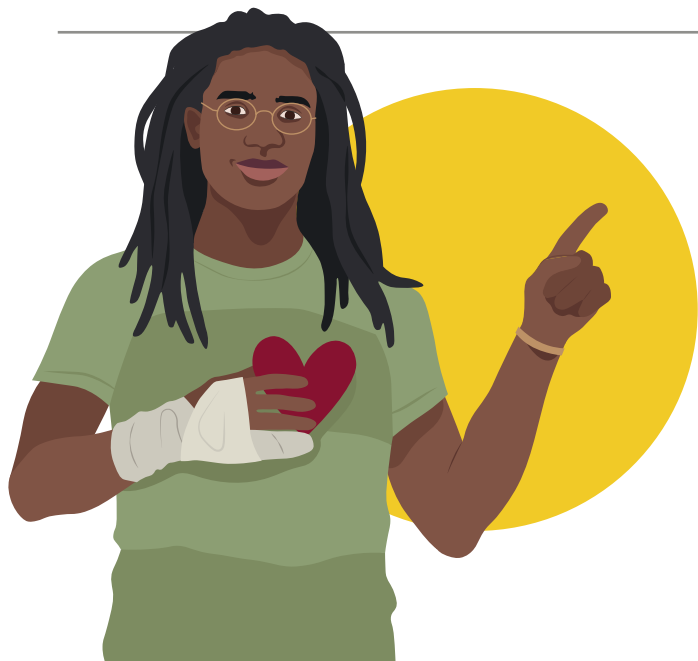


Describing and Documenting Your Pain for Care

Pain is an uncomfortable feeling that usually signals an injury or illness. Its purpose is to let you know that you must do something (or stop doing something). The presence of pain often means that something is wrong, so do not ignore it.



Your health matters.

There is a deep-rooted history of the healthcare system ignoring, dismissing, and undertreating Black people's pain. This dangerous trend stems from myths about biological differences between Black and white people — which was used to justify slavery.

A 2016 study revealed that many white medical students and residents believe Black people feel less pain than white people.¹ Immediate action must be taken to rectify racial disparities in pain management.

You deserve quality health care.

This guide was created to assist Black people in pain to receive the necessary care and treatment by improving communication with a doctor or other medical professional.

By using this guide, you will learn how to:

Clearly describe the pain you are feeling

Assess and track your pain over time



Download this guide and have it easily accessible on your phone or tablet during your next doctor's appointment.

COMMONLY USED TERMS

In this section, you will find commonly used words when describing pain — these terms can help you identify “types” of pain and explain “how it hurts.”

Types of Pain

- Acute

»»

Acute pain is typically related to an illness or injury and lasts a relatively short time — anywhere from a few minutes to three months.²

- Chronic

»»

Chronic pain, also called constant or persistent pain, is any pain that lasts longer than three months. The pain can be continuous or off-and-on. Chronic pain can have several causes, such as a health condition or psychological factors like stress, anxiety, and depression.³

- Neuropathic

»»

Neuropathic pain is caused by nerve damage or damage to other parts of the nervous system. Some people who experience neuropathic pain describe it as a shooting, stabbing, or burning pain that “feels like pins and needles.”

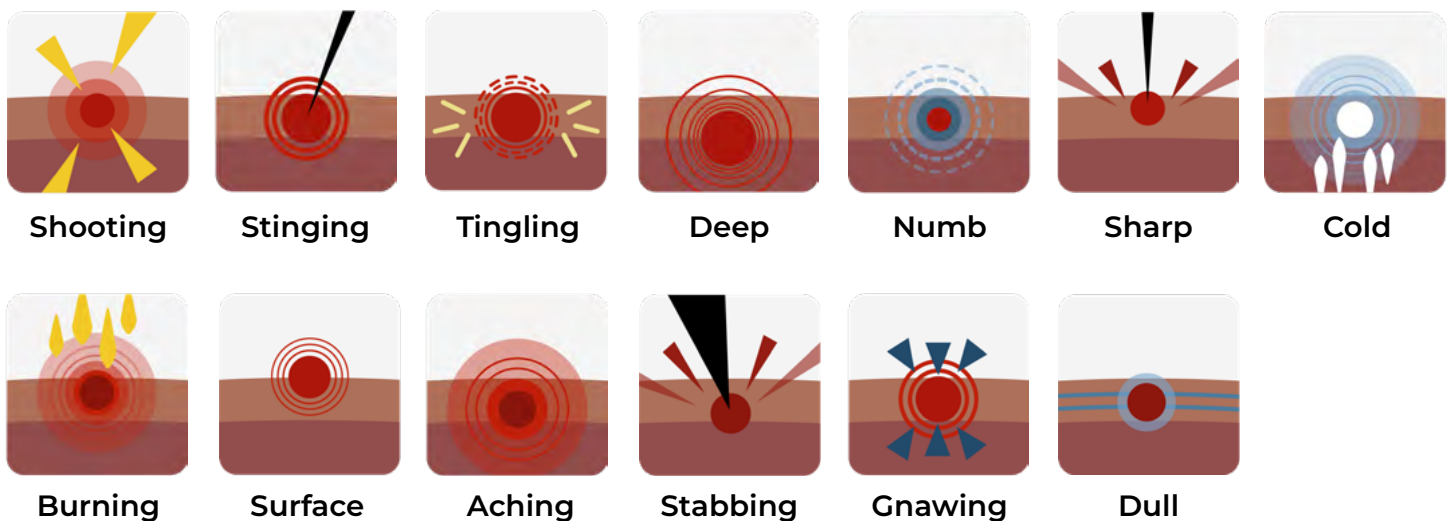
- Nociceptive

»»

Nociceptive (naa-ki-sep-tuhv) pain can be acute or chronic and is often caused by an external injury, such as burning your hand, breaking a bone, or stubbing your toe. This pain is often felt in the joints, muscles, skin, tendons, and bones.

How it Hurts

Below are commonly used terms to describe how pain feels in the body, with accompanying images to show how it may feel.



TIPS FOR DESCRIBING YOUR PAIN

The first step in helping your doctor understand your pain is effectively describing it. Here are some topics to cover when talking to your doctor about any pain you are experiencing.

Describe how severe the pain is

Let your doctor know if the pain makes daily activities more difficult. Think about how the pain affects your life, from the minute you wake up to when you go to bed. Consider whether you can concentrate effectively at work, prepare meals, or perform household chores efficiently.

Describe what your pain feels like

It would help if you used specific words like sharp, stabbing, dull, aching, burning, shocking, tingling, throbbing, deep, pressing, tender, splitting, etc.

Describe where on your body you feel pain

Explain if you have pain in one or several places or if the pain seems to move around. The location of your pain can indicate that you have symptoms of an underlying condition.

Describe how often you feel pain

Explain if the pain lasts momentarily, a few hours, days, weeks, months, or persists all the time.

Describe what makes your pain feel better or worse

For example, explain if the pain worsens during a particular time of day or if you move in specific ways. Also, clarify if there are any activities or methods that offer relief.

Tell your doctor about past treatments or approaches you've tried

List any medications that you've taken to help relieve the pain or if you've tried yoga, massage, heating pads, and other therapies. Describe what was effective and what was not.

Describe the mental and emotional impact of the pain you experience

Tell your doctor if the pain causes difficulties with concentration, feelings of sadness, irritability, depression, or if it causes you to avoid contact with others.

PAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

Is your pain a constant companion, or does it come and go unexpectedly? Does it feel like pins and needles, or is it a sharp, shooting pain? This questionnaire is here to support you in better understanding your pain. Empower yourself with knowledge and take the first step towards understanding your pain today.

Where is My Pain?

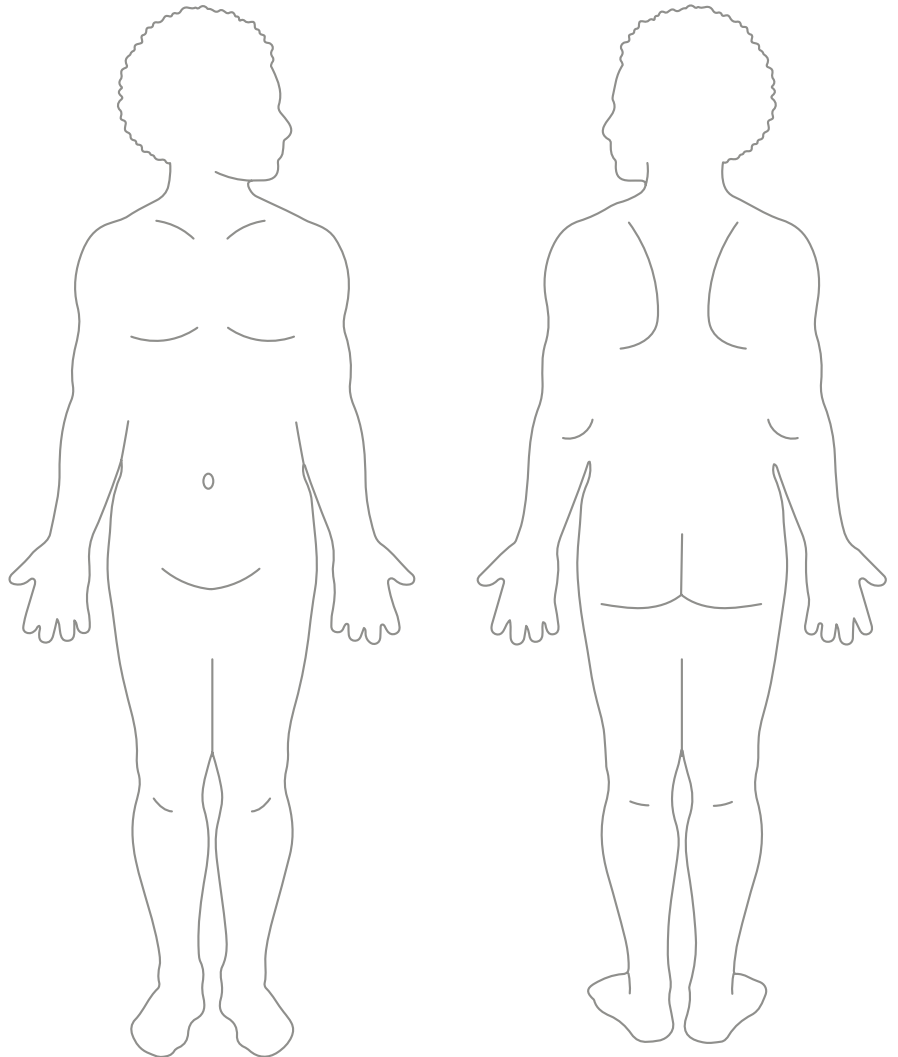
On the following figure, mark all areas where you feel pain. If it applies, you can shade areas darker where the pain is more intense and lighter where it is less intense.

[Please select all that apply]
I mostly feel pain in:

- One specific spot
- Spread out all over
- Shooting pain from one central location

FRONT

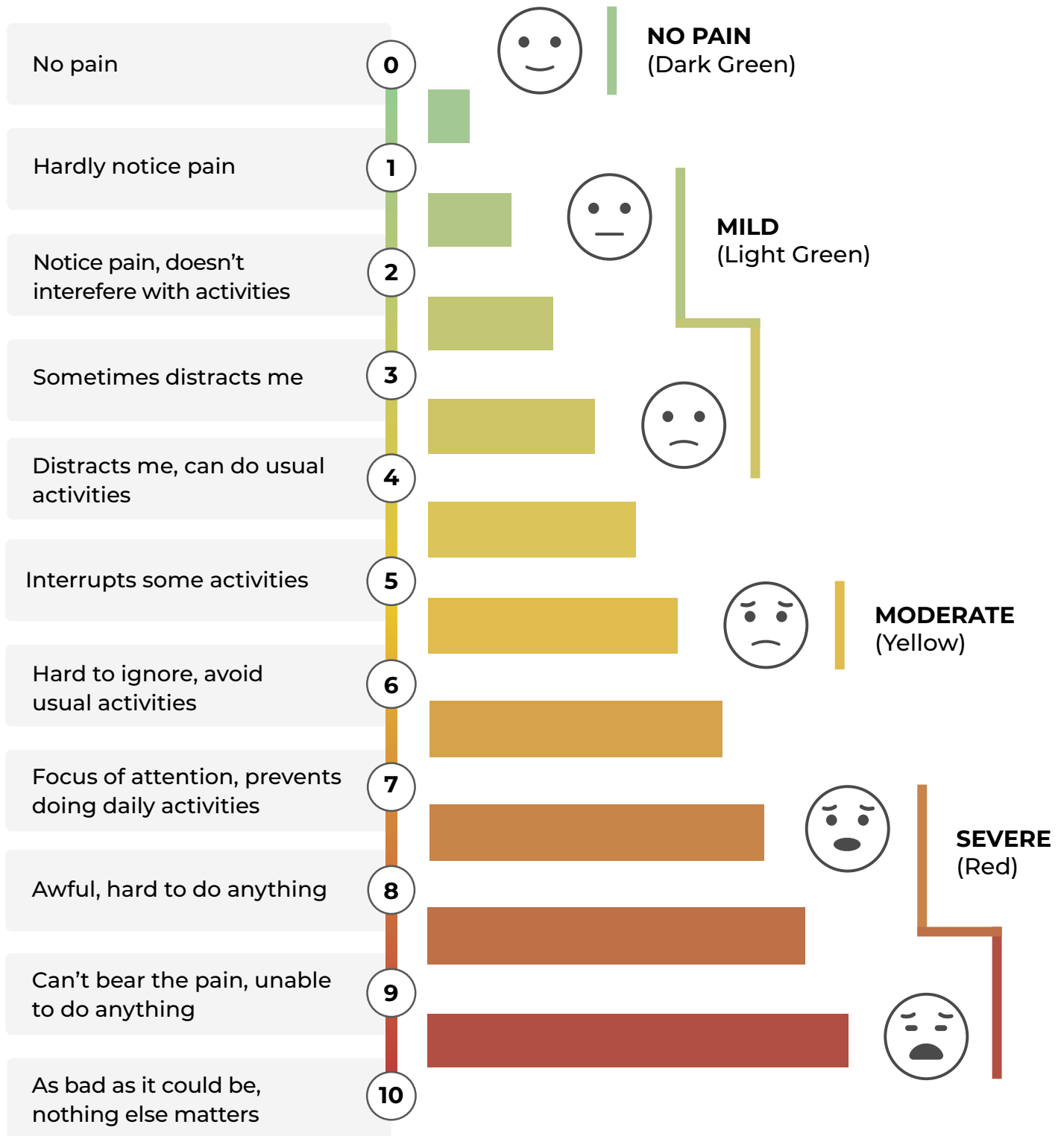
BACK



Notes/Comments:

Describing My Pain

Use the following pain scale to rate your average pain on a typical day.⁴



Notes/Comments:

When & How Does it Hurt?

1 How long have you experienced your pain?

Less than 3 months

3-6 months

6-12 months

Greater than 12 months

Other: _____

2 How often does your pain occur?

Daily

Weekly

1-2 times a month

Other: _____

3 Is your pain constant?
If yes, please skip to question #5.

Yes

No

4 When in pain, how long does it last?

Minutes

Hours

Days

Weeks

Other:

5 Are there any activities that trigger your pain or make the pain worse (e.g., bending over, walking upstairs)?

Yes

No

Unsure

If yes, please describe:

6 Are there any activities that make it better (e.g., laying down, sitting upright)?

Yes

No

Unsure

If yes, please describe:

7 Does your pain limit what you can do (e.g., you used to read nightly but now migraine pain prevents you)?

Yes

No

Unsure

If yes, please describe:

Burning

Electric Shock

Nagging

Intense

Pins & Needles

Sharp

Shooting

Spasms

Splitting

Stabbing

Tender

Throbbing

Tingling

8 What types of pain do you experience? (Select all that apply)

Aching

Cramping

Dull Ache

DAILY PAIN TRACKER

A daily pain tracker is a helpful tool that allows you to record and assess various aspects of your pain. It tracks a wide range of information, such as the location, intensity, frequency, and duration of your pain. It also tracks details about medications, identification of pain triggers, and activities that either improve or worsen your pain.

The purpose of using a daily pain tracker is to enhance pain management. By recording detailed information about your pain experience, the tracker helps improve communication between you and your doctor.

Note: You may print and fill out multiple copies of the following template to create your own pain journal.



Date & Time: _____

Describe your pain

how long it lasts, where it is, what it feels like (e.g., dull, sharp, stabbing, etc.)

Rate your pain

0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain possible)

What made your pain worse?

What helped relieve the pain?

medication and non-medicine approaches such as exercise, meditation, heating pads, etc.

Describe your activity level and mood

if the pain has affected your daily life such as sleep, work, spending time with friends and family, etc.

Comments

such as problems or side effects of medications, mental and emotional impact of the pain

+ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you prefer to use an app to track your pain experience, here are some pain diary apps that you can quickly download to your smartphone or tablet.



For more support on your pain management journey, check out these other resources from The Pain Equity Project:

[Your Roadmap to Treating Your Pain](#)

[Describing and Documenting Your Pain for Care](#)

[Caregiver's Guide to Supporting a Loved One Experiencing Pain](#)

[Pain Scale](#)

This app will help you track your pain triggers, pain intensity, symptoms, treatments, medications, activity, and mood. You can also send summary and detailed reports for better communication with your doctor. **Free and available on iOS, Google Play, and Web App.*

[Manage My Pain](#)

This app will help you reflect on your day, track how you're feeling, highlight trends and patterns, record how well your medications are working, and effectively describe your pain to your doctor. **Free and available on iOS, Google Play, and Web App.*

[My Pain Diary & Symptom Tracker: Gold](#)

This highly customizable app features tracking for multiple diseases and conditions, medication tracking, color-coded calendar to spot patterns and trends, PDF reports that can be shared with your doctors, iCloud sync, and graphs. **Costs \$4.99 and available on iOS.*

References

- [1] Hoffman, K. M., Trawalter, S., Axt, J. R., & Oliver, M. N. (2016). Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences between Blacks and Whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(16), 4296–4301. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1516047113>
- [2] Beaumont. (2021). Types of Pain | Acute, Chronic, Radicular & More | Beaumont | Beaumont Health. www.beaumont.org/services/pain-management-services/types-of-pain
- [3] Cleveland Clinic. (2021). Chronic Pain: Symptoms, Treatments. Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4798-chronic-pain>
- [4] Defense & Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS). (n.d.). www.dvcipm.org. <https://www.dvcipm.org/clinical-resources/defense-veterans-pain-rating-scale-dvprs/>