



Talking to healthcare professionals about your pain

A resource for women

Many women and girls face real and enduring challenges when seeking care and support for pain.

Women and girls deserve to be heard and believed when they talk about their pain.

The Women's Pain Standard Framework was developed by the Victorian Government in response to the Inquiry into Women's Pain <www.health.vic.gov.au/inquiry-into-womens-pain> to ensure that all women, girls and gender diverse people can access effective pain relief and quality pain care.

This resource was developed to help women and girls prepare for and have effective conversations with healthcare professionals, and to be treated as a partner in their care and decision-making about their health.

The following checklist suggests questions that you might ask healthcare professionals when talking about your pain.

You may want to ask these questions to learn how to safely manage your pain, understand what causes your pain, and find practical ways to cope and manage your daily life.

Not all of the questions will apply to you, and you may have extra questions that are specific to your situation or preferences.



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Questions to ask healthcare professionals about your pain



1. Understanding the cause of your pain

- ☐ What is actually causing my pain (for example: inflammation, nerve damage, structural damage)?
- ☐ What specific tests or imaging (for example: X-rays, MRIs) do I need to understand the cause of my pain, and why?
- ☐ Is this acute pain or chronic pain?
- ☐ What is the prognosis (expected course or outcome)? Is my condition likely to worsen or improve over time?

2. Your treatment options and medications

- ☐ What are the safest pain management options for me?
- ☐ What are the benefits, risks, and potential side effects of these medications?
- ☐ Are there alternatives to opioids, such as non-drug therapies, for managing this pain?
- ☐ What should I do if the medication I've been prescribed is not helping?
- ☐ Can I mix this treatment with other medications I am taking?
- ☐ Are there any lifestyle changes, such as diet or exercise, that could help me?
- ☐ Would a referral to a specialist or a multidisciplinary pain clinic help me?
- ☐ What are the expected costs for each pain treatment option?
How much of it will be an out-of-pocket expense?

3. Managing your daily life and flare-ups

- ☐ What can I do to safely manage pain at home, and what should I avoid?
- ☐ How can I create a "flare-up plan" to handle sudden increases in pain?
- ☐ How should I adjust my work or daily activities to accommodate the pain?
- ☐ Can you help me identify triggers for my pain?
- ☐ How can I manage the anxiety or stress associated with this pain?

4. Setting goals and next steps

- ☐ What are realistic, achievable goals for reducing my pain levels?
- ☐ When should I schedule a follow-up appointment to review my progress?
- ☐ What symptoms should I watch for that require immediate attention?
- ☐ If this treatment doesn't work for me, what is the next step in the plan?

Setting goals to manage your pain



Having goals may help healthcare professionals understand what is important to you, how pain is affecting your daily life, and which treatments or supports might help you.

Consider your goals that may help to focus and motivate you in managing your pain.

The following list are examples of goals that you may like to talk to healthcare professionals about.

Physical and functional goals may include:

- ☐ Increasing your mobility: Such as gradually increasing your walking time (for example: walking for 10 to 20 more minutes) or your standing tolerance (how long you can stand upright).
- ☐ Improving your sleep: Falling asleep faster and sleeping more soundly.
- ☐ Boosting your stamina: Enhancing your physical strength and endurance.
- ☐ Improving your self-care: Doing daily activities like cooking, showering, or driving independently.
- ☐ Increasing your activity levels: Participating in daily exercises or hobbies (such as walking, gardening or cycling).

Psychological and emotional goals may include:

- ☐ Improving your mood: Reducing pain-related anxiety, depression and/or stress.
- ☐ Enhancing your coping skills: Using techniques like mindfulness, meditation, or deep breathing to manage pain flares.
- ☐ Increasing your understanding of your pain: Learning about your pain triggers to better manage your symptoms.

Social goals may include:

- ☐ Returning to your work or hobbies: Returning to work, volunteering, or engaging in social, family, and community activities.
- ☐ Building a strong support system: Engaging with your family, friends, or healthcare providers (such as physiotherapists, GPs) for support.

Medical goals may include:

- ☐ Identifying causes of your pain: Seeking a diagnosis for the underlying pain.
- ☐ Optimising your medication: Reducing your reliance on pain medication or minimising any side effects from pain medication.
- ☐ Exploring your pain management options: Seeking care and advice from different healthcare professionals such as GPs, specialists and allied health professionals (for example: physiotherapists) to help you manage and treat your pain.

Questions that healthcare professionals may ask you about your pain



The following checklist lists some of the questions your healthcare professional might ask you about your pain.

Your answers will help them understand what you are experiencing and decide how best to treat or manage your pain.

- ☐ Where do you experience the pain?
- ☐ How often do you experience the pain?
- ☐ What is your medical history?
- ☐ Does your pain interfere with your everyday activities or movements? If so, which activities and how often?
- ☐ How often do you participate in enjoyable activities, such as hobbies or socialising with friends? How often does the pain interfere with these activities? Are there times when this is worse or better?
- ☐ Has pain impacted your energy, mood, or personality? This may include feeling more irritable, crying, or experiencing fear around activities or interactions that have previously not caused you concern.
- ☐ Has pain affected your relationships, such as with family members, significant others, friends or colleagues? What is your support system like?
- ☐ Has pain affected your work or caring responsibilities, including your ability to work, time that you can work, and content of work? This may include questions about your employment, or unpaid work like any caring responsibilities.



Additional pain resources for women

- **Pain and pain management – adults**
Pain management resource on the Better Health Channel <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/pain-and-pain-management-adults>
- **Tame the Beast**
<www.tamethebeast.org>
Tame the Beast is a collaboration between a pain researcher Professor Lorimer Moseley, a pain physiotherapist Dave Moen and a professional communicator Sam Chisholm. It is a freely available education tool that aims to inspire research-based action in the treatment of chronic pain. Tame the Beast is an animation, a question-and-answer resource and a podcast series.
- **Living with pain: Consumers and health professionals talk about their experience with chronic non-cancer pain and opioids**
<www.nps.org.au/pain>
Resources on chronic pain management developed by NPS MedicineWise under the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.
- **Pathways for easing persistent pain** <www.medicinesadvice.net.au/documents/112/MAIA_Topic_Persistent-Pain_Consumer-Brochure_Updates_F2-Interactive.pdf>
Resource developed by Medicines Advice Initiative Australia on persistent pain.
- **Chronic Pain Australia pain management resources**
<chronicpainaustalia.org.au/resources>
Resources on pain developed by Chronic Pain Australia, the peak consumer body for Australians living with chronic pain.

Where to get help

- Your healthcare professionals
- **Nurse-on-Call**
Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days).
- The **Aboriginal Women's Health Clinic** <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/services-and-support/aboriginal-womens-health-clinic> is a dedicated health service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Victoria.
- The **Virtual Women's Health Clinic** Tel. 1300 003 224 <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/services-and-support/virtual-womens-health-clinic> is a free telehealth service. You can access expert care, information and support on a range of women's health issues.
- **Women's Health Clinics**
<www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/services-and-support/womens-health-clinics> can help you with information, specialist care and services for women's health issues and conditions.
- The **Mobile Women's Health Clinic** <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/services-and-support/mobile-womens-health-clinic> is a free outreach service for women, girls and gender diverse people living in rural and regional Victoria.
- **NPS Medicine Wise**
Tel. 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424) – for information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines.
- **Urgent Care Clinics**
<www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/urgent-care-clinics>
Walk-in to a free Urgent Care Clinic when you need immediate healthcare now but it's not life-threatening. No referral, appointment or Medicare card needed.
- **Victorian Virtual Emergency Department**
<www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/services-and-support/virtual-emergency-care>
Video call with an Emergency doctor or nurse if you urgently need care. Free, 24/7. No referral, appointment or Medicare card needed.
- **In an emergency, always call triple zero (000).**

