How to Talk to Your Doctor
A Resource for Patients with Chronic Pain

Because I have a responsibility to know the risks.
CARES Alliance is dedicated to improving safety in patients being treated with prescription pain medicine. Our goal is to help you and your doctor work together to balance the successful management of your pain against the risks associated with your pain medicines.

Everyone has questions when it comes to pain and pain medicine. They come to mind while you live your everyday life. Questions like:

- Do I have to choose between pain and drowsiness in order to sit through my daughter’s recital?
- Is it okay to continue to take my current medications when I am taking my pain medicine?
- Should I put my pain medicine in a weekly pill dispenser?
- If I am feeling better, can I just stop my medicine?

The answers to some questions can help improve your life, while others can help keep you and your loved ones safe. Your doctor can answer many of your questions. Like many other patients, though, you may feel nervous about asking them. Don’t! Your silence could not only keep you from relieving your pain, it can put you and others in danger.

This workbook is designed to help you talk more openly and clearly with your doctor. You can use this tool to record your pain history and other important information and to create a list of your questions and concerns. Please take the time to complete this workbook and bring it to your next appointment to discuss with your doctor.

You are not alone. Pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined and is the leading cause of long-term disability.
What Should I Tell My Doctor?

There are things your doctor needs to know to make sure you get the best relief possible. This workbook contains some questions to ask yourself before your next appointment. Make sure to tell your doctor the complete answers to the questions contained in this workbook. It will help you and your doctor work together to manage your pain.

Questions About My Medical and Family History

Your answers to these questions can help your doctor know if certain treatments are right for you.

Why am I seeing the doctor?

Providing your history can help your doctor design the right treatment for you. Consider questions like:

- How did my pain start?
- How bad does my pain get each day?
- What is my pain like on most days?
- What illnesses do I suffer from, even those that are not related to my pain?
- Am I involved in any legal or insurance cases?

Your doctor needs to know as much as possible to provide the best care.

What medical history does my doctor need to know?

Don’t be nervous when answering this question. Staying silent can put you and others in danger. Consider questions like:

- Does anyone in my family have serious illnesses like heart disease or diabetes?
- Has anyone in my family had trouble with alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs?
- Does anyone in my family have mental health issues like depression or anxiety?
Have I or has my family had a history of mental health problems?

Mental health problems can increase the risk of abusing prescription drugs. There are things your doctor can do to reduce these risks. Remember to tell your doctor about any history or symptoms of:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Attention deficit disorder
- Stress
- Sexual abuse
- Schizophrenia
- Obsessive compulsive disorder

Drug overdoses are the second leading cause of accidental injury or death. Each year, more than 2 million people over the age of 12 misuse or abuse prescription drugs for the first time. Prescription drugs are the most commonly abused drugs behind only marijuana. Individuals who have problems with other drugs like alcohol or illegal drugs are also more likely to abuse prescription pain medicine.

What else have I done to try to treat my pain?

Sometimes, pain medicine can work even better if you do other things to relieve your pain. Let your doctor know if you do any of these or other things to help relieve your pain:

- Physical therapy
- Meditation
- Talk therapy (cognitive-behavioral therapy)
- Vitamins
- Herbal supplements
- Non-prescription medicine (over the counter)

If you are doing any of the things listed above, tell your doctor which ones help relieve your pain and which do not.
Questions About My Pain

Your answers to these questions will let your doctor know more about your specific pain and how best to treat it.

What type of pain do I have?

Which of these terms best describes your pain?

- **Acute pain**: comes on suddenly, is usually associated with an injury, and often lasts for a short time period or until the injury heals.
- **Chronic pain**: lasts for months, or possibly years, and does not go away in the normal amount of time it would take for an injury or illness to heal.
  - Intermittent pain: chronic pain that comes and goes during the day
  - Persistent pain: chronic pain that lasts 12 or more hours per day
  - Breakthrough pain: a sudden, brief flare of moderate to severe pain that “breaks through” the relief provided by around-the-clock opioid pain medicine.

How much does it hurt?

There are a number of scales that can help your doctor determine how bad your pain is. Your doctor may ask you to rate your pain on a scale like the examples below. Consider your pain at its worst, least, and usual each day.
Where does it hurt?

Knowing the location of your pain is another way to help your doctor choose the right treatment for you. Your doctor may ask you to identify your pain in an illustration like the one below. Use the illustration below to mark the parts of your body where you feel pain.

What does my pain feel like?

Your doctor may ask you to describe your pain using words like the ones below. Mark the words below that best describe your pain:

(check all that apply)

- Aching
- Throbbing
- Tender
- Stabbing
- Gnawing
- Pricking
- Sharp
- Radiating
- Burning
- Penetrating
- Deep
- Cramping
- Dull
- Numbing
- Shooting
- Squeezing
When does it hurt the worst?

It might help your doctor to know if there is anything that makes your pain worse. Consider some of these factors:

- Coughing
- Certain activities
- After eating
- Time of day (morning, middle of the night, etc.)

What makes it better?

It also might help your doctor to know what makes your pain feel better. Consider some of these factors:

- Body position
- Rest
- Heat
- Medicine

What does it keep me from doing?

Your doctor may ask you how pain affects your daily activities. Think about things you cannot do because of your pain, such as:

- Carrying groceries
- Eating
- Sleeping
- Walking
- Being with friends
- Watching sporting events
- Working
- Sex
- Exercising
- Being with family

How is my mood?

When you are in pain, sometimes it can affect your mood. Let your doctor know if you are feeling:

- Depressed
- Stressed
- Anxious
- Irritated
Questions About My Treatment Goals

These questions can help you and your doctor work together to develop the best course of treatment possible. Seeing your relationship with your doctor as a partnership can help both you and your doctor know what to expect out of your treatment.

What do I expect to get out of treatment?

This question may seem simple: you want your pain to go away. In reality, though, pain rarely can be completely relieved. When thinking about what you want to get out of treatment, it may be helpful to think less about pain and more about what it is that pain keeps you from doing. Let your doctor know about things you are missing out on that you would like to be able to do again. Consider activities like:

- Sitting down to dinner
- Returning to work
- Being with friends
- Walking around the block
- Working full-time
- Getting out of bed
- Beginning physical therapy
- Being with family
- Exercising daily
- Attending a support group

What are my concerns?

Before starting treatment, think about the things you might be worried about. Consider potential concerns like:

- Increasing your activity level
- Following medical orders

After you have started treatment, think about any concerns you may have and discuss them with your doctor. Consider potential concerns like:

- Running out of medicine
- Being seen as a complainer
Questions About Medications I Take

These questions cover things your doctor needs to know to keep you safe and to make sure you are getting the most out of your treatment. ALWAYS give your doctor and pharmacist a list of the medicines you are taking before starting a new pain medicine.

What other medications do I take?

Sit down and make a list of every medicine that you take and give the list to your doctor at your next appointment. You should also bring it with you to your pharmacist. Many medicines, even those available without a prescription, can affect how your prescription pain medicine works. Put every medicine you take on the list, including:

- Vitamins
- Prescription medicines
- Herbal supplements
- Non-prescription drugs (over the counter)

It is especially important to record any medicines that might make you sleepy, including:

- Antidepressants
- Anti-anxiety pills
- Muscle relaxants
- Sleeping pills
- Anti-nausea medicines
- Cold or sinus medicines

You can use the CARES Alliance “My Meds Card” to record all of your medications. You can download this card at www.caresalliance.org.

My Meds Card

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Take this card with you every time you see your healthcare provider:
1. To make sure your pain medicine is right for you, tell your doctor:
   - Your complete medical and family history, including any history of substance abuse or mental illness
   - The nature, severity, and cause of your pain
   - Your treatment goals
   - All medications you take, including over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicines, vitamins, and dietary supplements
2. Take your opioid pain medicine with you to every office visit
3. Take your opioid pain medicine exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider

Take this card with you every time you see your pharmacist:
   - Record all of your medications in the space provided
   - Never opt out of pharmacy counseling
   - Read the Medication Guide you get with every opioid pain medicine prescription

This card is provided as an important aid in ensuring that your opioid pain medicine is right for you. You should carry this card with you every time you see your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
What other doctors do I see?

It is helpful for your primary care doctor and your pain doctor to know the other healthcare professionals you may be seeing. Consider specialists like:

- Oncologist
- Rheumatologist
- Chiropractor
- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist
- Neurologist
- Physical therapist
- Nurse practitioner

Remember that your pharmacist is a good person to answer your questions about your medicines. Never decline pharmacy counseling.

What medicines have I taken in the past that did not work?

Knowing what did not work for you in the past can help your doctor figure out what might work for you in the future. Tell your doctor about medicines you have taken for your pain and why they did not work. When thinking about these medicines, consider questions like:

- Did the medicine relieve my pain?
- Did the medicine cause bad side effects?

What medicines am I allergic to?

Allergic reactions to medicines can be dangerous or even life-threatening. Tell your doctor about all of your allergies.
What else in my life might affect my medicine?

Certain drugs affect how your body responds to pain medicine. Tell your doctor if any of these examples apply to you:

(check all that apply)

- Drinking alcohol
- Taking sleeping pills
- Smoking
- Taking anything that makes you feel drowsy or sleepy

When you first start taking pain medicine or change the dose, it is important to keep in close contact with your doctor. Family members or caregivers may be helpful in providing your doctor with information.

What side effects have I had?

Make sure you tell your doctor if you are experiencing any side effects when you take your pain medicine. Some may be dangerous, and others you may not be able to tolerate. Your doctor will be able to help. Many pain medicines have similar side effects. Tell your doctor if you are experiencing any side effects, including:

(check all that apply)

- Sleepiness
- Drowsiness, tiredness, or sedation
- Extreme drowsiness
- Slowed or troubled breathing
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Chills, shaking, or tremors
- Feeling faint or dizzy
- Irritability or restlessness
- Perspiration or fever
- Backache, joint pain, or weakness
- Constipation
- Abdominal cramping
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088. If you have an emergency, please call 911, your local emergency number, or the Poison Control number (1-800-222-1222).
Questions About My Home Life

It is important for your doctor to know about your life at home as well. Answering these questions can help improve your treatment and can help keep everyone safe.

Most people who abuse prescription drugs get them for free from a friend or relative. Many others buy or steal them from a friend or relative (see figure below).

Most prescription drug abuse starts with pain patients giving away their medicine.

Never give away or sell your medicine to anyone

Source of Prescription Drug Abuse

Drug Dealer/Stranger 5%
Internet <1%
Single Healthcare Provider 18%
Friend/Relative (bought/stole) 15%
Friend/Relative (free) 55%
Other <7%

Some individuals may want to take your pain medicine.

Always lock up your prescription pain medicine
Who might have access to my medicines?

Many people abuse prescription pain medicine. There is a risk that your medicine may be stolen by family members, friends, or people who come to your home for any reason. Talk to your doctor about:

- Your home environment
- Who may have access to your medicine
- Where and how to store your medicine

What are the possible signs of drug abuse?

Look for possible signs that someone is abusing drugs:

- Messy appearance
- Flushed cheeks or face
- Mood swings
- Needle marks

Look for issues at school or work:

- Repeated absences
- Complaints from teachers or coworkers
- Reports of intoxication
- Loss of interest

Look for health issues related to drug abuse:

- Nosebleeds
- Sores
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Depression

Look for signs in your home:

- Disappearance of prescription drugs
- Missing alcohol, cigarettes, or money
- Hidden stash of alcohol

Thousands of people die each year from drug overdoses as a result of abuse and misuse of prescription pain medicine.
Who lives in my house?

Accidental use of prescription pain medicine by a child is a medical emergency and can result in death. Also, some people may abuse prescription pain medicine. To best protect you and your loved ones, let your doctor know who lives with you. Make sure to mention:

- Young children
- Teenagers or young adults
- Friends
- Anyone with a history of drug abuse, drug-seeking behaviors, depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues

Who visits my house?

You should also mention anyone who might be visiting your home. Consider mentioning:

- Repair workers
- Cleaning services
- Friends of your children
- Children/grandchildren

What support can I rely on?

Your family and friends also can help you make the most out of your treatment. Tell your doctor if you have anyone who can:

- Accompany you to appointments
- Pick up your medicine if needed
- Remind you to take your medicine
- Act as a support group
- Look out for signs of side effects, like overdose

If a child accidentally takes your prescription pain medicine, get emergency help right away by calling 911, your local emergency number, or the Poison Control number (1-800-222-1222), even if the child is not experiencing any side effects.
What Can My Doctor Tell Me?

There are many things you should know about your pain treatment, such as the risks of prescription pain medicines and how to safely use your medicines. If your doctor has not spoken to you about these issues, be sure to bring them up.

About the Risks

An overdose of some pain medicines can cause life-threatening breathing problems. Things to remember:

- Many prescription pain medicines should be taken only if you are already regularly using opioid pain medicines in an amount that provides pain relief for the entire day and your body is used to taking these medicines. This may mean you are opioid tolerant. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Certain opioid pain medicines should be taken only for long-term pain and should not be used to treat pain that is expected to last for only a short time.
- Always take your pain medicine exactly as your doctor prescribed, and never take more than your daily prescribed dose.
- Always take your pain medicine as directed; if you are not sure how to take it, ask your doctor.
- Always keep your pain medicine out of the reach of children.
- Never give your medicine to anyone else, even if they have similar symptoms.
- If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

Other substances, like alcohol, prescription drugs, and non-prescription drugs, can increase the risks associated with taking your medicine. Ask your doctor about alcohol and other medicines. Never take prescription pain medicines with alcohol, and only use with other medicines with your doctor’s permission.
Addiction is a disease in which people crave or cannot control use of a drug or continue using a drug even though they know it is not good for them. Things to remember:

- Addiction does not often develop when taking opioid pain medicine as prescribed under the guidance of your doctor
- The chance of abuse or addiction is greater in certain individuals with risk factors such as:
  - Family history of substance abuse
  - Personal history of substance abuse
  - History of childhood sexual abuse
  - Mental health issues

Physical dependence and tolerance are not the same as addiction.

- Physical dependence is a condition in which you become sick if you suddenly stop taking your opioid pain medicine because your body has gotten used to it
- Tolerance occurs when your body becomes used to a drug, leading to it not having the same effect as it did before

Some warning signs can help alert your doctor to possible problems with your treatment. Let your doctor know if any of these apply to you:

- Taking medicine more frequently than scheduled
- Taking multiple doses at once
- Frequent early refills
- Searching for new doctor(s)
- Isolation from family and friends
- Use of medicine for reasons other than pain relief
About How to Take My Medicine

Your doctor has options when it comes to what medicine he or she might prescribe to you to treat your pain. There are many non-prescription pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, aspirin, and ibuprofen. There are also a wide variety of prescription medicines such as:

- Codeine (eg, Tylenol 3)
- Fentanyl (eg, Duragesic)
- COX-2 Inhibitor (eg, Celebrex)
- Oxymorphone (eg, Opana)
- Hydrocodone (eg, Vicodin)
- Oxycodone (eg, OxyContin)
- Hydromorphone (eg, Dilaudid)
- Morphine (eg, Avinza)

No matter which medicine you take, your doctor will tell you what dose of your pain medicine to start taking and may increase it over time until you find the right balance between pain relief and side effects.

NEVER change your dose without talking to your doctor first and ALWAYS take your medicine exactly as directed.

Your doctor may expect you to sign a treatment plan that is helpful in:

- Formalizing the partnership between you and your doctor
- Including you in the decision-making when it comes to your treatment
- Providing an outline of what is expected from you if you want your treatment to be as successful as possible
- Avoiding any misunderstandings between you and your doctor

Sometimes, your doctor may monitor your progress during treatment. This does not mean your doctor does not trust you. Instead, it helps your doctor know how best to treat you. Monitoring might include things like:

- Asking you questions
- Reviewing your treatment journal
- Counting your pills
- Evaluating your medication levels by urinary drug screening
About How to Help Keep My Family Safe

Your doctor can tell you how best to keep your medicine safe, including:

- Storing your pain medicine in a child-proof container out of sight and reach of children
- Keeping your pain medicine in its package until the moment you are ready to take it
- Not storing your pain medicine in a weekly or daily dose container

Your doctor also can talk to you about how best to protect your pain medicine from theft, including:

- Locking up your medicine in a safe place
- Keeping track of the number of pills
- Looking out for the signs of potential drug abuse

Your doctor will likely tell you to limit access to your medicine to yourself or your caregiver only; this includes:

- Not sharing your medicine with someone else, even if they have the same symptoms as you
- Not selling or giving away your medicine to anyone

Your doctor can also tell you how to safely dispose of your pain medicine as soon as you and your doctor decide you no longer need it. Suggestions might include:

- Removing from packaging and flushing down the toilet
- Finding out if your community has a medicine take-back program by checking the National Community Pharmacists Association locator online (www.disposeymeds.org)
Concerns or Questions for Your Doctor

Make a list of your concerns and questions and bring it with you when you see your doctor. Here is a list of suggested questions:

- How long will it take my medicine to start working?
- What are the common side effects of my medicine?
- Who should I call in case of emergency?
- How should I take my medicine?
- How should I store my medicine?
- How can I keep my medicine safe?
- What do I do if I start feeling better?
- Is there anything else I should know?

Make a list of any side effects you have experienced and bring it with you when you see your doctor and your pharmacist.

NEVER be nervous about asking questions.

Helpful tips:
- Receive your prescription pain medicine from one doctor
- Receive your prescription pain medicine from one pharmacy
- Keep a list of all your medicines and review with your doctor and pharmacist
- Take your prescription pain medicine exactly as prescribed
- Keep your prescription pain medicine away from children and anyone for whom it was not prescribed
- Appropriately dispose of unused medicine
About Keeping a Journal

Have you ever left a doctor’s appointment and only then remembered the questions you wanted to ask?

- Have you ever found it hard to describe your pain?
- Have you had trouble answering the question, “How do you feel?”
- Have you ever wished you had taken notes the last time you saw your doctor?

These are all reasons why keeping a journal is important. Filling out a journal may feel like work, but, when you fill it out and take it to your next appointment, you should see that the work was well worth it.

CARES Alliance has developed a helpful tool you can use to start your journal. Ask your doctor or download a copy at www.caresalliance.org today and start taking control of your life.

Pain Management Journal
Additional Resources


CARES Alliance was created to help patients, healthcare professionals, nonprofit organizations and people in the pharmaceutical industry work together to improve patient safety.

To learn more about how you can help improve patient safety and reduce the risk of prescription pain medications, call us at 1-800-233-8969 or visit our Web site:

www.caresalliance.org