



# Side Effects May Include

Leah Nielsen

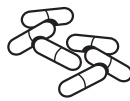
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poems by Leah Nielsen

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## Patient

Name and name of guardian or spouse, name of insurer, name of insured, name of the name you once went by, names of immediate family members living and dead, if dead name what killed them, names of the diseases all of them had,

names of the children you were supposed to have had had you been less academically inclined, less prone to pain and possible

defects, less persistent about leaving that small Iowa town—write it down—*no pregnancies, no abortions,*

(I am not now nor have I ever been a member of the Parent Party), *non-smoking, one partner* (see spouse), *moderate drinker*—

less than one per week—same for sex, though the patient desires more, the patient is trying to lose, trying to stop, trying to keep

from crying while filling this out, the patient imagines she's hanging (though no indications for suicide) from a tree like Odin,

the patient imagines her hanging might be endless. Patient persists in believing she too owns a sword and is pierced by the sword

(in a most nonsexual manner) as she hangs from the tree, a maple in the front yard of her childhood home—a 3-bedroom, 1-bath ranch on an acre of land—a maple she's named Yggy, because the patient considers herself clever—



alternately, if and when the hanging ends, the patient imagines she will have gained nothing—no alphabet, no wisdom, and mercifully, no weight—the patient is impatient (oh, you knew the patient had to do it) with forms and physicians who wonder out-loud if she really wants children. She wants a pain med that won't mute the brain and to hike the Appalachian Trail, she wants cookies for breakfast with a glass of cookie juice, she wants once more to curl into the scratch of her grandfather's (died of old age at 87) plaid wool shirt, and wait for his voice to turn to roar in the story of thunder, his after-dinner cigarette filling the dim-lit living room with a swirl. She likes all things grandfather—Old Spice and sawdust, fishing poles and pocket watches—she likes to fall asleep with visions of the bobber drawing concentric circles on the pond. She likes the names the form gives her pain—*prick, ache, burn, throb, pull, sharp*—because at heart she is 14 and every word is innuendo, (This is why when you ask the patient what positions increase her pain, she can only giggle.) and, too, the names of medications—*astelin, cymbalta, darvocet, flexeril*—

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she hears them as if they were formed off the tuned teeth of a music box's steel comb. The patient does not know the cause

or reason for the pain. The patient is pained by the search for such things. The patient has had x-rays and MRIs, heat and ice packs, chiropractic cracks and traction, and nearly killed the teacher in guided mediation, got caudal-epidural shots, and facet joint injections,

done PT and EMDR, gone to group, read Chicken Soup for the Obstreperous Pain Patient's Soul, has a real Chinese acupuncturist and a Goddess of Massage. The patient does not have a number for her pain, but does possess the numbers of several good psychologists.

When asked to give the history of her pain, the patient notes: I didn't fall or crash or bend and lift, didn't twist until I felt a pang.

There was no precipitating incident and no red flag. *One day*, my grandfather said, *fire met ice in Ginnungagap, the yawning abyss,*

*and on that day the universe was formed.* But we can't say what day it was or how long that vast void had existed.

## Automatic Thoughts Beginning with a Woodpecker

Situation	Automatic Thoughts	Physical Response	Emotional Response	Cognitive Distortion	Changed Thought
Woodpecker, incessantly, drilling the secret code into the shutters	Am a cliché, am one step shy of poet on Prozac	Cramping—in palm, tongue	Near vapidty	Jumping to conclusions	What truths did Robert Frost really find in nature? Termites? Call exterminator? Birds are stupid
Have stolen line from friend	Am thief and bird hater	Slight twinge, slight twining	Desire to grind coffee to fine mist	Labeling	Call it collage, keep calling it friendship, birds <i>are</i> stupid
Phone rings	I should like people more, more people	Like cooking pasta when you're full	Like the end of a book you hoped would last longer	Should statements	Don't have to answer, am never full
Dirty dishes in both sides of sink	Why this upswept floor, unkempt heart?	Like a pencil against an inflamed callous	Like the end of a movie you almost liked	Mental filtering	Divide dishes: big stuff, small stuff wash big stuff first—looks like an accomplishment

Dog wants out	After loss, what else is there to write about?	Like gum tree seed balls—prick, prick, rive	Understand woodpecker	All-or-nothing	There's desire There's good-bye
Good-bye is loss	Airports—the eternal good-bye	In need of Dramamine	Longing—for just one more good-bye	Magnification	No Dramamine, drama, no more mine, mine, mine
Want to leave husband for Frost	Heel, cheat, scrap, shred	Like an wheel, a wheel rut	Bird at empty feeder	Labeling	Frost is dead, dilemma, and not the only
Have been eternally sad for 23 days, 5 hours, and 47 seconds	Am all definitions of <i>green</i>	<i>I want</i>	<i>I want</i>	Disqualifying the positive	Am only 2nd and 5th definitions of <i>green</i>
Definitions are malleable	<i>Good</i>	Like snow globe's snowman	Dissatisfaction	Emotional reasoning	Green

# Pain Intensity Numerical Rating Scale

- 0 — Absence of pain. How a boy from your childhood knows you for who you are, a popsicle-thin girl from the sticks in cut-offs and a Nags Head t-shirt dirt-coated knees from digging potatoes.
- 1 — Ring tones—*Für Elise*, *Baby's Got Back*. Also, unorganized closets.
- 2 — All-You-Can-Eat establishments. Please specify: ☐ Chinese ☐ Country Cooking ☐ Other\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 — The boy (see 0), the blonde boy you rode the bus with from 4th to 6th grade, 45 minutes each way, but never spoke to... he was all youthful thew and redneck tan. This is the number you choose the most. It says, you cannot pull me down.
- 4 — Landfills and local television news and the newscaster, *Ironically, it was the firewall that kept the fire from spreading*.
- 5 — The blonde boy, in 10th grade, on drugs. If you can't move, you tell the doctor 5. He declares, *You can have kids, but I can't guarantee you'll be able to hold them afterwards*. You're 40 before you realize he may have been joking.
- 6 — Shoeless airport security checks, sun screen and shampoo in little plastic bags. Nail clippers, tweezers at home.
- 7 — Here you wish for the children's version of the form, the Wong-Baker faces that always seem half-stoned.
- 8 — You never use anything above 7. You don't want anyone to know it can be that bad. The last time you saw the blonde boy was a summer party after high school. Drunk on warm PBR. Thin and disoriented, he frightened you, though he did not speak, did not even look in your direction, smart college girl, smart enough to get out, smart enough to stick to boys who only drank and left your bed before dawn.
- 9 — The isolation of a Hopper's *Room by the Sea*, a room in which something more should be.
- 10 — Worst Pain. Each storm along Carolina's Outer Banks brings the vanishing of road segments. It's not the loss that matters, but the moment something is, and then is no more.



# A Patient's Guide to Narcotics



## Sponsored by OPP Other Patients' Perspectives

A non-profit organization committed to making you feel less like “The Woman” in the “before” shots in commercials—the woman staring out a picture window, shoulder-length brown hair tucked behind her ears, face lined like a mother who has had it Up. To. Here. The walls an institutional blue/gray, though you can tell by the curtains— a gray/blue

silk embroidered with nickel-sized flowers in cranberry or mauve—that she’s at home. The plastic window grill punctuates her fragmented perspective. Holy symbol, Batman! And she’s wearing a blue button-down shirt. How will she ever get out?

## What are Narcotics?

Narcotics are drugs—opium and derivatives of—morphine, codeine, and heroin, with its much muted vowel and Darren Aronofsky associations—are drugs for patients with acute pain, or those recovering from surgery, or those dying of cancer who have only drugs and drug-induced dreams. (That’s a whole

’nother pamphlet.) In some cases, narcotics may be used to treat patients with chronic pain, though note they cannot right the twinge left by the 4th-grade girl who would not let you play Charlie’s Angels. The use of narcotics to treat patients with chronic pain is problematic, as it may lead to misuse and addiction (see also: Requiem for a Dream). This pamphlet explains:

- ✦ The types of narcotics
- ✦ When and how they are used
- ✦ What to do when you know you should not operate heavy machinery.

## You May Need Narcotics if

- ✦ The mere idea of pain reminds you of late September tomato vines coiled about rusted cages.
- ✦ Once a week you have the dream of waiting tables.
- ✦ You teach.
- ✦ You have children or were unable to have children.
- ✦ You understand the wood shed, door almost unhinged, battened down, twined up.
- ✦ You know the wind—always the purple garter belt, the bourbon breath on the back of your neck.
- ✦ You always end up with images of wind.

There are many more reasons at the base of the pain. No matter the reason, narcotics may make an excellent addition to your pain care regimen.

## The Science of Narcotics

If you’re 40 or older: think of the path from your pain receptors to your brain as two truckers on C.B.s, one asks for a smokey report, the other responds. The narcotic is the idiot kids on their K-mart walkie-talkies breaker breakering for a 10-36, even though they’re wearing watches.

If you’re under 40, use the cell phone as a metaphor.

You = your brain.  
Your friend = your pain.  
iPhone4 = your narcotic.

The signal is just gone.

Just gone is not all bad. It means you and your pain cannot communicate clearly. In this way it’s like you trying to get the husband to understand that there *is* a ring around the tub. It is also like forcing a smile or a simile.

## Possible Side Effects May Include:

- ✦ The inability to tell your pain to fuck itself.
- ✦ The inability to hula-hoop or get drunk enough to hula-hoop at parties, even when your friend has a Malibu pink and silver



## Measured Thoughts Beginning with a Greyhound Bus, Where -5 = Despair and 5 = Potential Happiness

