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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/pain.html>

Pain

What is pain?

Pain is a signal in your nervous system that something may be wrong. It is an unpleasant feeling, such as a prick, tingle, sting, burn, or ache. Each person feels pain differently, even if the reason for the pain is the same. Pain may be sharp or dull. It may be mild or severe. Pain may come and go, or it may be constant. You may feel pain in one area of your body, such as your back [<https://medlineplus.gov/backpain.html>] , abdomen [<https://medlineplus.gov/abdominalpain.html>] , chest [<https://medlineplus.gov/chestpain.html>] , or pelvis [<https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicpain.html>] , or you may feel it all over.

Pain can help alert you that there is a problem. If you never felt pain, you might seriously hurt yourself without knowing it, or you might not realize you have a medical problem that needs treatment. Finding out what's causing your pain will help your health care provider determine the best way to manage or treat it.

What are the types of pain?

Patterns and types of pain are named based on how long and how often you have pain. These include:

- **Acute pain** usually happens suddenly because of a disease, injury, or inflammation (irritation, redness, and/or swelling). This type of pain is often sharp and acts as a warning that something is wrong. It usually goes away when the cause is treated or healed, though sometimes it can turn into **chronic pain** [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>] . Some examples of causes of acute pain include **broken bones** [<https://medlineplus.gov/fractures.html>] or dental issues [<https://medlineplus.gov/toothdecay.html>] .
- **Chronic pain** lasts for longer than three months or the time in which you should have healed. It can affect all aspects of daily life, including your mood and relationships. Some conditions that might cause chronic pain include **arthritis** [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>] or back problems.
- **Episodic pain** can happen from time to time and may occur with long-term medical conditions. Some conditions that might cause episodic pain include **sickle cell disease** [<https://medlineplus.gov/sicklecelldisease.html>] or chronic migraines [<https://medlineplus.gov/migraine.html>] .

Pain may also be categorized by what is likely to be the cause of the pain. Pain may be described as nociceptive (caused by tissue damage or inflammation), neuropathic (caused by nerve damage), or nociplastic (caused by changes in how your nervous system processes pain).

What causes pain?

Understanding what causes pain and why people feel it differently may be difficult. Often, it's easier to find the cause of acute pain due to an injury than the cause of chronic pain, or you may have an ongoing cause of pain, such as **cancer** [<https://medlineplus.gov/cancer.html>] .

In some cases, there is no clear cause. Environmental factors and psychological factors such as stress and beliefs about pain may affect the way you feel pain and respond to treatment.

How is pain diagnosed?

You are the only one who knows how your pain feels. Your provider can best measure your pain by how you report it. They may ask you:

- Where is the pain in your body?
- How long have you had the pain?
- How does the pain feel, such as stinging, burning, or sharp?
- How often do you have pain?
- When do you feel pain, such as in the morning, evening, or all the time?
- What relieves the pain?
- How does pain affect your daily life?
- Is the pain mild, moderate, or severe?
- To rate the pain on a scale.

If the cause of your pain is unknown, your provider may also do a physical exam and order blood tests or other medical tests to help find the cause.

What are the treatments for pain?


Pain is not always curable, but there are many ways to manage and treat it. Treatment depends on the cause and type of pain. Treatments may include medicines, such as pain relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>] . There are also non-drug treatments [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>] , such as acupuncture [<https://medlineplus.gov/acupuncture.html>] , physical therapy, and sometimes surgery.

Depending on the cause of your pain and your symptoms, your provider may recommend lifestyle changes. These may include suggestions for:




- Eating a healthy diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/diets.html>]
- Adding exercise [<https://medlineplus.gov/benefitsofexercise.html>]
- Losing weight [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>]
- Managing stress [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>]
- Improving mental health [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtoimprovementalhealth.html>]

NIH: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Start Here

- Overview of Pain [<https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/brain-spinal-cord-and-nerve-disorders/pain/overview-of-pain>] (Merck & Co., Inc.)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.merckmanuals.com/es-us/hogar/enfermedades-cerebrales-medulares-y-nerviosas/dolor/introducci%C3%B3n-al-dolor>]
- Pain [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/pain>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
- Pain Management [<https://madeforthismoment.asahq.org/pain-management/>] (American Society of Anesthesiologists)


Treatments and Therapies

- Managing Pain: Moving beyond Opioids [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2018/10/managing-pain>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/control-del-dolor>]
- Non-Drug Pain Management: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]
- Nonopioid Therapies for Pain Management [<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/hcp/clinical-care/nonopioid-therapies-for-pain-management.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Pain Relievers: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/painrelievers.html>]



Living With

- Pain Management: Lifestyle & Management [<https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/pain-management/lifestyle>] (American Geriatrics Society)


Related Issues

- Pain and Depression: Is There a Link? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/expert-answers/pain-and-depression/FAQ-20057823?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/depression/expert-answers/pain-and-depression/faq-20057823?p=1>]
- Somatic Symptom and Related Disorders [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/somatic-symptom-and-related-disorders/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/trastornos-somatormorfos-es/?adfree=true>]
- Using Alcohol to Relieve Your Pain: What Are the Risks? [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/using-alcohol-to-relieve-your-pain>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/recurrir-al-alcohol-para-aliviar-el-dolor-cuales-son-los-riesgos>]


Genetics

- Congenital insensitivity to pain: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/channelopathy-associated-congenital-insensitivity-to-pain>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Paroxysmal extreme pain disorder: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/paroxysmal-extreme-pain-disorder>]  (National Library of Medicine)




Videos and Tutorials

- Feeling pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000054.htm>]  (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000054.htm>]

Statistics and Research

- Trouble With Touch? Feeling Your World [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2024/04/trouble-touch>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/tiene-problemas-con-el-tacto>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Pain [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Pain%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Pain Management [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?intr=%22Pain+Management%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Pain Perception [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Pain+Perception%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)



Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Comparative efficacy of virtual reality headset and auditory distraction for reducing... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40750865>]
- Article: Mental Imagery Enhances Pain Reduction and Visual Processing in Knee Osteoarthritis... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40740591>]
- Article: Effects of Non-Immersive Virtual Reality Exercise on Self-Reported Pain and Mechanical... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731752>]
- Pain -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Pain+Perception%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Pain%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Pain+Mana>]

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Find an Expert

- Find a Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Physician [https://members.aapmr.org/AAPMR/AAPMR_FINDER.aspx] (American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation)
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/>] 
- Pain Consortium [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/current-research/trans-agency-activities/pain-consortium>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)

Children

- Why Do I Have Pain? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/pain.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/pain.html>]

Older Adults

- Eldercare at Home: Pain Management [<https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/pain-management>] (AGS Health in Aging Foundation)
- Pain: You Can Get Help [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/pain/pain-you-can-get-help>]  (National Institute on Aging)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/dolor/dolor-usted-puede-obtener-ayuda>]

Patient Handouts

- Aches and pains during pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000580.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000580.htm>]
- Neuralgia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001407.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001407.htm>]
- Palliative care - managing pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000532.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000532.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Aches and pains during pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000580.htm>]
- Feeling pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000054.htm>]
- Groin pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003111.htm>]
- Muscle aches [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003178.htm>]
- Neuralgia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001407.htm>]

Palliative care - managing pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000532.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Abdominal Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/abdominalpain.html>]

Back Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/backpain.html>]

Chest Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chestpain.html>]

Chronic Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronicpain.html>]

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/complexregionalpainsyndrome.html>]

Non-Drug Pain Management [<https://medlineplus.gov/nondrugpainmanagement.html>]

Pain Relievers [<https://medlineplus.gov/painrelievers.html>]

Palliative Care [<https://medlineplus.gov/palliativecare.html>]

Pelvic Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicpain.html>]

Period Pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/periodpain.html>]

Trigeminal Neuralgia [<https://medlineplus.gov/trigeminalneuralgia.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Pain* is the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/pain.html>] on *Pain*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

"Ouch, That Hurts!" The Science of Pain [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/ouch-that-hurts-the-science-of-pain>]

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