

DECODE PAIN

Understanding Pain Through Science

Planning for Your Healthcare Appointment

Introduction:

If you've ever left a doctor's appointment feeling dismissed, misunderstood, or like you weren't heard, you're not alone. Many people experiencing persistent pain struggle to communicate effectively with healthcare providers, often because they don't know how to describe their experience.

This guide can help you prepare for your next appointment so you can advocate for yourself confidently and clearly. You'll learn how to describe your pain, consider what questions to ask, and how to work collaboratively with your healthcare team.

The reality is that appointment times are usually limited. Being prepared can help you to make the most of the available appointment time.

Remember: This is YOUR body, YOUR experience.



Tips:

- Consider taking someone with you to the appointment. This can:
 - Be a 'second pair of ears' – someone else who can pick up on information you may miss
 - Another person is less emotionally involved in your condition and may have a more objective perspective (it can be helpful to discuss the appointment with this person afterwards)
 - If this is a significant person in your life, it may help that person to gain a better understanding of your pain experience
- Consider booking an extended appointment (if this is an option available to you)
 - This will allow you extra time if you have quite a bit to discuss

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Part 1: Preparing Before Your Appointment

Know Your Goal for This Appointment

Before you walk in, be clear about what you're hoping to achieve.

For example, are you wanting to:

- Gain understanding what's happening in your body?
- Find out about referral?
- Explore treatment options?
- Have your concerns validated and taken seriously?

Your Questions List:

Write down 3-5 priority questions before you go. When you're in the appointment, it's easy to forget what you wanted to ask.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

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Part 2: The Communication Script

Use assertive communication.

Remember you and your doctor/physio etc. are a team. You are the team manager. Effective communication is important to foster a good relationship with your healthcare provider.

Describing Your Pain Effectively

Doctors respond well to specific, descriptive language. Use these categories:

When it started: _____

What I was doing when it started (if known): _____

How it has changed over time: _____

Treatments I've tried:

1. _____ (Result: _____)

2. _____ (Result: _____)

3. _____ (Result: _____)

What makes it worse: _____

What makes it better: _____

How it affects my daily life:

Sleep: _____

Work: _____

Exercise/movement: _____

Relationships/social life: _____

Mental health: _____

What I'm most worried about: _____

Quality of pain: Sharp, dull, burning, aching, throbbing, stabbing, tingling, shooting

Location of pain: Be specific - "left lower back near my hip" rather than just "my back". Point to the painful areas to make your description clear. (I.e. "back" could mean lower back, upper back)

Timing: Constant, intermittent, worse in mornings/evenings, triggered by activities

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Intensity: Use the 0-10 scale

- At its worst: ____
- At its best: ____
- On average: ____
- Right now: ____

List your medication

- If you have a written or typed list to give to your doctor that can be helpful (include the dosage if possible).
 - If you're unsure, take your medications with you
 - Or take photos on your phone of the medication labels and save these in a folder so that you can find them easily
- List the medication that you have tried in the past and what effect they had

What investigations have you had? (X-rays, scans, blood tests etc.)

Include the date and results of the investigation.

What other healthcare professionals are you currently seeing?

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Part 3: Questions to Ask Your Doctor

About Understanding Your Pain

- Clarify your understanding of what the healthcare professional has explained
- Clarify anything that is unclear.
- Sometimes we don't understand medical terms – ask what they mean.

About Treatment Options

- ☐ "What are all the treatment options available for this (type of pain)?"
- ☐ "What do you recommend as a first step, and why?"
- ☐ "If this approach doesn't work, what would be the next step?"
- ☐ "If this approach doesn't work, what would be the next step?"
- ☐ "I've heard about, what do you think about that?"

About Self-Management

- ☐ "Are there things I can do at home to help manage this?"
- ☐ "Should I modify any of my activities?"
- ☐ "What can I do? What should I not do?"

About Follow-Up

- ☐ "When should I schedule a follow-up appointment?"

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Part 4: After Your Appointment

Take Notes Immediately

Before you leave the parking lot, write down or voice-record:

- The main points discussed
- The diagnosis or working theory
- The treatment plan
- Follow-up instructions
- Any prescriptions or referrals

Remember: Finding the right doctor is like finding the right therapist - sometimes it takes a few tries to find someone who really listens and works well with you.

Follow Through on the Plan

- Fill prescriptions or schedule recommended treatments
- Track your progress
- Note any changes (positive or negative)
- Keep your follow-up appointments

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Part 5: Final Thoughts

Communicating about pain is a skill, and like any skill, it improves with practice. The fact that you're preparing and learning how to advocate for yourself is already a huge step forward.

Key Takeaways:

- ✓ Be specific and descriptive about your pain
- ✓ Come prepared with notes and questions
- ✓ Use the scripts and templates provided
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask for clarification
- ✓ Advocate for yourself respectfully but firmly
- ✓ Remember that you deserve to be heard



You are the expert on your own body and experience. Your doctor is the expert on medical knowledge. The best outcomes happen when you work together as a team.

Your Next Steps

Before Your Appointment:

- ☐ Print or save this guide to bring with you
- ☐ Fill in the templates with your specific information
- ☐ Write down your top 3-5 questions
- ☐ Track your pain for at least 1 week

During Your Appointment:

- ☐ Use the opening statement template
- ☐ Refer to your notes and questions
- ☐ Ask for clarification when needed
- ☐ Take notes or ask permission to record

After Your Appointment:

- ☐ Review and write down what was discussed
- ☐ Follow through on the treatment plan
- ☐ Schedule follow-up appointments
- ☐ Track your progress

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Want to Learn More About Pain?

Understanding the science behind pain can empower you to communicate even more effectively with your healthcare team and manage your symptoms better.

Visit decodepain.com to learn more

Follow @decodepain on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) for:

This guide is for educational purposes and does not replace professional medical advice. Always consult with qualified healthcare providers about your specific situation.

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