

First visit to a pain management doctor

On the first visit, a pain management doctor will ask you questions about your pain symptoms. He or she may also look at your past records, your medication list, and prior diagnostic studies (X-ray, MRI, CT). It helps if you bring any prior, available studies (X-rays, CT scans, MRIs). The doctor will perform a thorough physical exam. At the first visit, it helps to have a pain journal or at least, to be aware of your pain patterns.

Common things your doctor may ask on the first visit:

1. Where is your pain? (what body part)
2. What does your pain feel like? (dull, aching, tingling)
3. How often do you feel pain? (how often during the day or night)
4. When do you feel the pain? (with exercise or at rest)
5. Setting for the pain? (is it worse standing, sitting, laying down)
6. What makes your pain better? (does a certain medication help)
7. Have you noticed any other symptom when you have your pain? (like loss of bowel or bladder control)

Start a pain journal

A pain journal helps keep track of how much pain you have on a given day. It also helps you communicate better with your doctor. You can note how often you have pain and how your pain prevents daily activities like sleep, work and hobbies. The journal will help you notice some things that may improve your pain: meditation or prayer, light stretches, massage. It will also help you note what makes your pain worse (stress, lack of sleep, diet).

You can rate your pain on a 0-10 scale, in the pain journal. This rating scale is a common tool, used by many doctors to measure pain.

0 you are pain-free

1-3 you have nagging pain

4-6 you have moderate pain that interferes with daily activity: work, hobbies

7-10 you have severe pain that stops you from your daily activities

A journal helps you record your mood and if you are feeling depressed, anxious or have trouble with sleep. Pain might trigger these states, and your doctor can suggest some coping skills or medications to help you. A pain journal helps you gain control over your pain and empowers you in ways you might not have thought possible.