



## **Communication is key to pain management Helping your physiotherapist understand your pain is important to create a healing partnership**

**Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Physiotherapy Society!**

Have you ever sat in a consulting room and been stumped when a medical professional asked you what your pain felt like?

"It's sore," you respond. "It's very sore." What else can you say?

Getting a full picture across to your physiotherapist (or any other medical professional treating you) is critical. To get a better understanding of your experience, a physiotherapist or other therapist will ask questions that will draw out more information, but it's helpful and empowering if you can do a little prep work in advance. First up, make some notes:

### ***When does the pain happen?***

Is it worse when you get up in the morning, or worse later in the day, and if so, when?

### ***What makes it worse?***

Is it worse with movement or worse when resting?

Is there something specific, or a specific activity, that triggers your pain – for example, a movement (like turning to one side, or reaching for something, or rising from a sitting position or carrying your baby)?

### ***What makes it better?***

Is it better after a hot bath?

Does cold (an ice pack, for example) make it better?

Is it better for movement or better for resting?

Next, make a little ***medical history*** for yourself:

When was the first time you noticed this pain?

Has it been continual since then, or has it gone away and come back?

List the ***treatments you've tried***, from simple painkillers to anti-inflammatory patches to pain-blocking injections.

What has the ***impact of the pain*** been?

Has it stopped you from doing things you normally do?

Has it interfered with your enjoyment of life?

Has it interfered with your mobility?

Have you needed help from a partner or child or even a carer?

Identify **where the pain occurs**. Is it in only one place, or many? Can you show your physiotherapist exactly where on your body the pain is? (If you can't reach it with your fingers, get your spouse or child to mark the place before the consultation, with a pen!)

**How bad is it?**

Use a simple scale of 0-10, with 10 being the worst pain you've ever experienced and 0 being no pain.

Finally, think of some terms you could use to describe the **quality of the pain**:

Burning

Stabbing or piercing

Tingling

Cutting

Cramping

Throbbing

Heavy

Tender

Shooting

Sickening

Remember to tell your physiotherapist if you have any numbness anywhere on your body, or pins and needles.

"The more we know about your pain, the better placed we are to help you," says Andrea Linser, chair of the South African Society of Physiotherapy Pain Management Special Interest Group. "And thinking through the history, quality and impact of your pain is helpful for the patient as well as the physiotherapist, as it gives you insight and can help you understand the treatment you're given."

To find a physiotherapist, go to [www.saphysio.co.za](http://www.saphysio.co.za).