

Discussing pain medications with your patients is important to ensure they understand the options to manage their pain. It is important to provide clear and consistent guidance, whether your patient has a history of substance use disorders, may be taking opioids for the first time, or may be at higher risk for misuse or overdose. Treatment of a patient's pain should be personalized, multidisciplinary, and patient-centered.

Dental providers are urged to consider nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as the first line therapy for acute pain management when appropriate.

Studies have shown the use of NSAIDs, with or without acetaminophen, offered the most favorable balance between benefits and harms, optimizing efficacy while minimizing acute adverse events.

For additional details, visit the ADA's new resource titled *Chairside Pain Management Checklist*, which complements this one, at [ADA.org/Wellness](https://www.ada.org/Wellness).

Talking Points

Consider the following points during conversations with your patients:

- Educate your patients about the diagnosis and the **cause of their discomfort, the timeline** and expectation for medicine (such as antibiotics) or treatment to help ease discomfort.
- Educate your patients about the **type of medications** you have prescribed for them and for how long they should take the medication. In certain instances, opioids may be justified for acute pain.
- Inform your patients of potential **drug interactions** with other substances. Encourage them to discuss potential drug interactions with their healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Remind your patients to **take medications as prescribed** and to **not share** their medicine with others.
- Discuss how to **safely store** and [dispose of medications](#). Visit [MouthHealthy.org](https://www.mouthhealthy.org) to learn more about keeping prescription drugs from becoming a source of harm.

As a healthcare provider, subscribe to your state's [prescription drug monitoring program \(PDMP\)](#) to ensure optimal care of your patients. In some jurisdictions, participation in the state PDMP may be mandatory.

WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

Another critical component is *how* to communicate with patients dealing with acute pain. Effective strategies for working with patients experiencing acute pain are not learned in a single session. They must be practiced, reviewed, and applied consistently over time. Careful consideration and practice with the following strategies will lead to improved communication with patients who are experiencing acute pain.

Establish Trust

- Establish trust and express empathy regarding the impact of pain on daily activity and function.

Consider Effect on Quality of Life

- Review how pain management will help or hinder the patient's quality of life in both the short- and long-term.

Explore Options

- Explore options to get to a safer and more effective approach to managing pain.

Slow Down

- Take time to listen to your patient. Show, both verbally and nonverbally, that you are genuinely interested in helping and collaborating with the patient to find a solution.
- Check often to ensure that your patient understands what is being communicated. Ask the patient to communicate back to you the instructions they just heard from you. This is known as the *teach-back method* where the patient sums up to the doctor what the patient has heard. Learn more about the [Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#) from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- Take the time necessary to review and discuss treatment options and fully explain associated risks and benefits. Emphasize your concern for their safety and the desire to find safe approaches that will enhance overall quality of life, not just reduce pain temporarily.

Recognize their Uniqueness

- Address your patient by name and be sure to consider your patient's culture, experience, and social influences.
- Keep in mind that patients may interpret and communicate symptoms, illness, and treatments based on their unique cultural perspective, which may vary greatly from your clinical perspective.

Listen Reflectively

- Listen intently to your patient's concerns, trying to empathize with their perspective. Maintain eye contact and use appropriate nonverbal cues.
- Relay the information back to the patient in their own words to confirm understanding. Allow adequate time to correct misunderstandings and answer questions.

Show Empathy

Use empathic statements, such as:

- "I understand this isn't easy."
- "We're going to work on this together."
- "I understand how you feel [that you're in pain]; let's figure out what is the best treatment approach for you."

Consider your nonverbal communication:

- Make eye contact and express having appropriate, caring facial expressions.
- Voice a caring tone and pace.
- Be mindful of your body posture.

Remember to practice to improve confidence and strengthen your message delivery.



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