

UK Pain Messages

There are a large number of messages used for Chronic Pain by a variety of organisations. The aim of the UK Pain Messages is to define and gain consensus and consistency over the facts and figures used when highlighting the burden of Chronic Pain in the UK. These messages, separately in the public domain, have been approved by the following organisations/individuals: Faculty of Pain Medicine, Royal College of General Practitioners' Chronic Pain Lead, British Pain Society, Chronic Pain Policy Coalition and importantly patients via Pain UK.

- The Departments of Health for England and Scotland recognises chronic pain as a long-term condition in its own right and as a component of other long-term conditions.¹
- Approximately 8 million adults report chronic pain that is moderate to severely disabling*. From the same report, it is estimated that 43% of adults (just under 28 million people) currently live with a degree of chronic pain in the United Kingdom. The prevalence in older age groups is even higher, with up to 62% of those aged 75 and over reporting chronic pain symptoms.⁷
- A person living with pain will have a very poor quality of life - much worse than other conditions, and as bad as significant neurological diseases such as Parkinson's.²
- Low back pain is ranked highest out of 291 conditions studied by the Global Burden of Disease study, ranking number one for years lost to disability worldwide. In fact four of the top 12 disabling conditions globally are persistent pain conditions (low-back and neck pain, migraine, arthritis, other musculoskeletal conditions).³
- 41% of people who attended pain clinics report that their pain has prevented them from working, and 13% have had to reduce their hours.⁴ Chronic pain may affect up to 30% of young adults of working age (18-39 year olds).⁷
- 66% of people attending A&E seeking help with pain had more than three visits to a healthcare professional in the preceding six months.⁴
- The 2008 Chief Medical Officer report states that 25% of pain sufferers lose their jobs; 16% of sufferers feel their chronic pain is so bad that they sometimes want to die.⁵
- Men and women in the lowest income households are more likely to report chronic pain (42%), compared to those in the highest quintile (27%).²
- Severe chronic pain is associated with increased risk of mortality, independent of socio-demographic factors.⁶
- Attending specialist pain services improves quality of life (in total, 56% of providers reported post-treatment improvement in EQ5D-3L score, and 76% reported improvement specifically in pain-related quality of life).⁴



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* Definitions

- In brief moderate to severe disability pain relates to the higher disability scores as gauged by the Chronic Pain Grade Scale.
- In detail: The Chronic Pain Grade Scale (CPGS) developed by Von Korff and colleagues is a validated, bi-directional tool that assesses the severity of chronic pain, based on its characteristics and the impact on a person's activities. The scale uses a severity score based on participants' subjective assessment of their: current pain; worst and average pain over previous six months; pain related disability and pain interference with social and work related activity. An algorithm divides respondents into: low disability, low intensity chronic pain (Grade I); low disability, high intensity chronic pain (Grade II); high disability, moderately limiting chronic pain (Grade III); and high disability, severely limiting chronic pain (Grade IV).

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