

AMERICANS TALK ABOUT PAIN

A SURVEY AMONG ADULTS NATIONWIDE

CONDUCTED FOR RESEARCH!AMERICA

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BY

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

From July 15 to 19, 2003, Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted a nationwide survey for Research!America among 1,004 adults to assess their views about pain in America. The interviews were conducted via telephone using a random-digit-dial sample technique. The data's margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points among all adults at the 95 percent confidence level. Sample tolerances for subgroups are larger. Minimal weights have been applied to age.

The survey's objectives included gauging Americans' perceptions of how pain sufferers and the medical community deal with the problems of chronic pain. Specific areas of inquiry addressed the following topics:

- Understanding how significant a problem chronic pain is in our society—who it affects and how it has changed their life.
- Determining the secondary effect of chronic pain on close family members or friends. How significant is this effect and what it means to people who live with those in chronic pain.
- Measuring public perception of how well the medical community deals with chronic pain, the level of optimism that exists for long-term success, and the willingness to fund research.
- The psychology of pain in American society. How society perceives people in pain and how Americans feel they should and do deal with pain.

Several key points stand out about pain in American society.

- ▣ The prevalence of pain in America: within the past year three in every four Americans surveyed (76%) either personally have experienced chronic or recurrent pain themselves or have a close family member or friend who has suffered from chronic pain. For one-fifth of all Americans, the effect of this pain has meant major lifestyle changes in employment, residence, or personal freedom and mobility.
- ▣ Chronic or recurrent pain affects every age group, with those between 18 and 24 years old about as likely as older Americans to have experienced pain.
- ▣ The medical community is viewed as having limited success in helping patients deal with pain. Many pain sufferers have tried a variety of methods for relief, from acupuncture to chiropractors to surgery. Prescription medications receive the highest marks for effectiveness.
- ▣ Culturally, although more Americans view pain as a misfortune, many still perceive it as a sign of weakness and believe that pain should be dealt with by toughing things out. Many also believe that the best way to treat their own pain is to “just keep going.” Outside of family, people can seem indifferent to someone in pain.
- ▣ Almost six in 10 Americans (57%) say they would be willing to pay a dollar more per week in taxes in order to increase federal funding for research into the causes and treatment of pain.

KEY FINDINGS

Americans in Pain

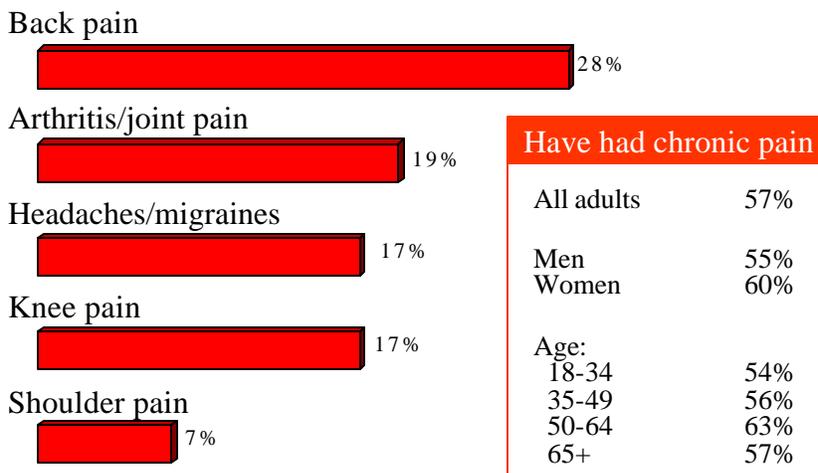
1 Much of America is hurting: the majority of adults (57%) in this country have experienced chronic or recurrent pain in the past year.

We asked people who have had chronic pain in the past year to describe their pain, both in terms of where the pain is and how long they've had it. More than three in five have been in pain for more than a year, and back pain is the most common type.

Moreover, pain has no borders and seems to affect all segments of American society. A surprising result is that those under age 35 are about as likely as older Americans to have experienced pain.

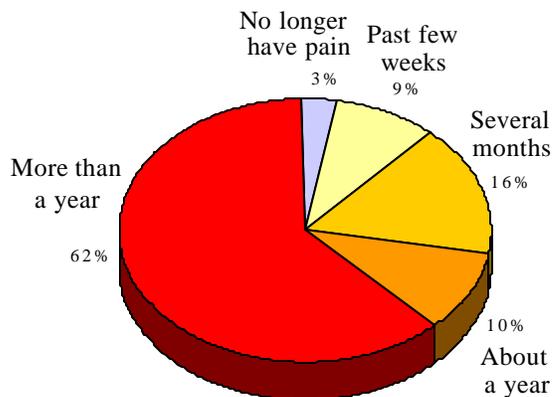
Pain in America

I have had chronic pain in the past year:



How Long Have You Had Pain?

Had pain for more than a year	
All pain sufferers	62%
Men	63%
Women	61%
Age:	
18-34	56%
35-49	61%
50-64	65%
65+	67%

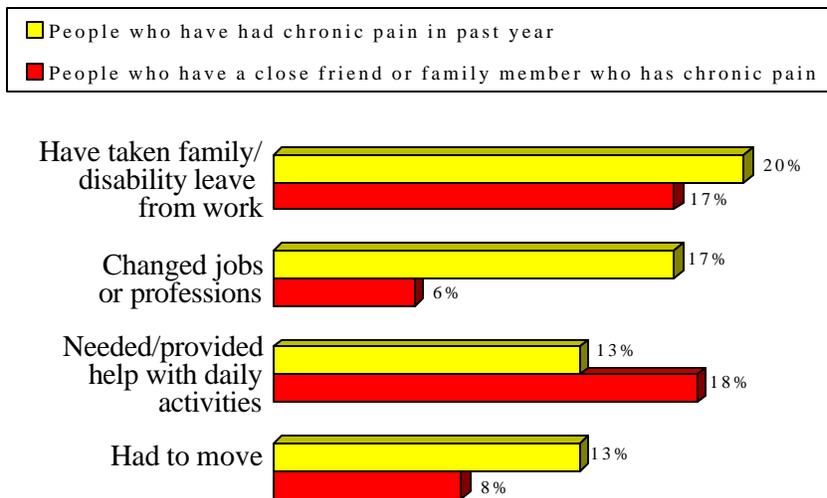


Dealing with the Pain

2 Significant numbers of current pain sufferers have had to make real changes in their lifestyle to accommodate their pain.

- Asked how their pain has affected their day-to-day-life, three-quarters (75%) of current pain sufferers acknowledge that they have had to make adjustments, including 33% who say they have made major adjustments.
- Among the major adjustments that chronic pain sufferers have made are such serious steps as taking disability leave from work (20%), changing jobs altogether (17%), getting help with an activity of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, or eating (13%), and moving to a home that is easier to manage (13%).

Lifestyle Adjustments Because Of Pain



Additionally, Americans are making adjustments to help those close to them who suffer from chronic pain.

- Although just under half of non-pain sufferers who have a family member or friend with chronic or recurrent pain say that they have made no adjustments as a result of their family member or friend's condition, 16% have made major adjustments and 35% have made minor adjustments.
- Three in five non-pain sufferers have helped a family member or friend in pain with household chores, and smaller proportions have missed at least one day of work (30%) or refused a social invitation (28%) to help out.
- In addition, it is noteworthy that 18% have helped with an activity of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, or eating, 17% have taken family care leave from work, 13% have given up a hobby or pastime, 8% have moved closer to the family member or friend in question, and 6% have actually changed jobs. Almost four in 10 non-pain sufferers (38%) have done one or more of these to help a family member or friend in pain.

Do You Feel My Pain?

3 Levels of sympathy and concern vary, but overall, most people who interact with a chronic pain sufferer on a daily basis are supportive, say the sufferers themselves. How much support you get, however, may depend on whether you are a man or a woman.

- Family members are among the most helpful to chronic pain sufferers. Three in four (75%) pain sufferers say that their spouse or significant other is generally supportive and helpful; children (67%) a little less so.
- Doctors (72% supportive and helpful) get high marks, but bosses (51%) earn mixed reviews. In fact, 16% of pain sufferers who have a boss say that that person is indifferent and tends to ignore them when the subject of their pain comes up, and one in ten describe their boss's attitude as irritated and annoyed.
- The following table illustrates how men and women match up when it comes to getting help and support from those around them. Compared with men, women are more likely to credit their doctors, children, and bosses with being supportive and helpful when hearing about their pain.

PAIN SUFFERERS WHO FIND SELECTED PEOPLE TO BE SUPPORTIVE AND HELPFUL		
	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
	%	%
A spouse or significant other	78	72
A doctor	68	76
Children	60	71
A boss or supervisor	41	60

A Visit to the Doctor

4 Nine in ten current pain sufferers have consulted some type of medical professional to try to ease their pain, and these professionals have prescribed everything from over-the-counter medications to surgery—with mixed results, according to survey respondents.

- Most pain sufferers (63%) have seen their family doctor for help, but many did not stop there. Forty percent made an appointment with a specialist, such as an orthopedist, and significant proportions have visited a chiropractor (25%) or a doctor who specializes in pain management (15%). One in ten have consulted other types of health care practitioners, such as an acupuncturist or an herbalist.

- While 43% of pain sufferers have been to only one type of doctor for their pain, a large proportion (38%) have consulted more than one practitioner in the medical community: almost one in five (18%) have visited two, 14% have tried three, and 6% have been to four.
- Treatments for pain have yielded mixed results. Although 58% of those who took prescription medication say that doing so was very or fairly effective for their pain, only 41% of those who took over-the-counter medications experienced the same relief. Chiropractic treatments proved effective for 54% of pain sufferers who tried them, while more standard physical therapy was effective for 48%. Fifty-four percent of pain sufferers who had surgery say that it was effective.
- Overall, 58% of current chronic pain sufferers say that they are very or somewhat satisfied with the treatment of their pain.

**PAIN SUFFERERS WHO HAVE TRIED VARIOUS
TREATMENTS FOR PAIN RATE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS**

	<u>Proportion Who Have Tried Treatment</u> %	<u>Proportion Of Those Who Have Tried It Who Rate It As Very/Fairly Effective</u> %
Prescription medications	69	58
Chiropractic treatments or therapies	39	54
Surgery	32	54
Physical therapy	48	48
Over-the-counter medications	79	41
Other treatments or therapies, such as acupuncture or aromatherapy	20	40

The Pain Paradox

5 An important disconnect exists between Americans' personal experience with pain and the broad general attitudes of society.

- As prevalent and significant as chronic pain is in our society, we find that Americans rate chronic or recurrent pain as the least problematic item on a list of health issues that includes cancer, obesity, heart disease, alcohol or drug abuse, and AIDS. Surprisingly, even people who say that they are currently suffering from chronic or recurrent pain, *and even those who say they experience severe pain often*, rate pain at the bottom of this list.
- Americans overall downplay their experience with pain and the need to acknowledge it.

- Americans like to think they are tough: only 10% admit to feeling more pain than most people, 49% say that they are about average when it comes to feeling pain, and 39% believe that they feel less pain than most people. Further, only 16% say that it is harder to manage their own pain, compared with 73% who find it harder to help a loved one through pain.
- An overwhelming 84% of adults believe that a person's state of mind influences the experience of physical pain a great deal or a fair amount, suggesting that a person can control his or her pain.
- Even though nearly half of adults say that American culture tends to view pain as a misfortune, a hefty 42% state that it is seen as more of a weakness.
- Americans are equally divided when discussing whether it is better to treat their pain themselves and just keep going (44%) or seek medical treatment (43%). Further, 44% of adults admire people who keep going, and only 34% think that those people are foolish. Ironically, those who have no pain are somewhat more likely to think that people who just keep going are foolish, whereas those in pain are much more likely to admire this trait.
- In terms of health care costs, people feel by more than two to one that overreacting to one's pain drives up costs more than does underreacting.

The Pain Gap

6 After all the lifestyle changes, doctor visits, and treatments, people still think that more could be done. In the end, there is hope that long-term pain remedies can be found and a willingness to fund research toward that end.

- Two-thirds of pain sufferers expect to have to live with at least some pain for the rest of their life, compared with only 30% who expect to become pain-free because of a cure or as a result of treatment or medication.
- Further, among non-pain sufferers with a close family member or friend who has chronic or recurrent pain, a majority (53%) feel that more can be done to ease their loved one's pain.
- Seven in ten Americans feel that pain research and management should be one of the medical community's top few priorities (16%) or a high priority (55%).
- Almost six in 10 adults (57%) say they would be willing to pay one dollar more per week in taxes to increase federal funding for scientific research into the causes and treatment of pain.

- That said, three in four Americans say that most prescription pain medications are unnecessarily expensive, whereas only 19% feel that the costs for research, development, and marketing justify drug prices.
- Americans continue to look to the medical and research communities for advances in pain management. Two-thirds say that when it comes to diagnosing and managing pain, a great deal or a fair amount of progress has been made in the past 10 years, and 70% foresee a similar level of progress occurring over the next 10 years.