

Pain Poll: Many Americans in Pain

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May 10, 2005 -- Pain plagues most American adults, a new poll shows.

More than half of Americans suffer from chronic or recurrent pain, and nearly half (46%) of poll takers reported pain in the last two weeks. That doesn't count the "usual minor annoyances," says the ABCNews/*USA Today*/Stanford University Medical Center poll.

The 1,204 adults included in the April telephone survey were a sample of the U.S. population, so their answers may paint a picture of pain on a national scale.

"Pain has been a hidden disease," says Raymond Gaeta, MD, in a news release. "It has not received as much attention as other diseases."

"But now there's a growing recognition that pain really is not just the sensation we have. It's something that interferes with every one of us, with life," says Gaeta, an associate professor of anesthesia at Stanford University's medical school and director of pain management at Stanford Hospital & Clinic.

Most Americans Live in Pain

Pain can be acute (usually short-term and injury-related), recurrent (on-again, off-again), or chronic (lasting three months or more).

After hearing the descriptions, recurrent pain was cited by 34% of poll takers, and nearly one in five (19%) said they had chronic pain. Forty-four percent said their pain was acute.

Where It Hurts

Asked where they mainly felt pain, a quarter of participants said their backs were the problem area. Here are the leading pain sites:

- Backs: 25%
- Knees: 12%
- Head/migraine: 9%
- Legs (not counting knees): 7%
- Shoulders: 7%
- Feet: 5%
- Hands/fingers: 4%
- Stomach/indigestion: 4%

Why It Hurts

Nearly half (48%) of participants said they didn't know what caused their pain.

For the other half, a quarter chalked their pain up to injuries or accidents; 20% blamed sports injuries. Arthritis was mentioned by 9%, broken bones by 6%, and disc/slipped disc/sciatica by 5%. Old age was reported as a cause of pain in 2%.

Pain's Impact on Daily Life

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How much did pain hamper mood, activities, enjoyment, relationships, work/chores, and sleep?

The responses were split. Just more than half said that when they had pain, it didn't interfere with those areas of life very much (56% or higher in all categories).

However, the others said pain had "some" or "a great deal" of interference with life. In this category, for instance, nearly four in 10 (39%) said pain interfered with their sleep and 43% said it affected their moods.

Still, the vast majority of people -- 91% -- said they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their life.

Attempts to Ease Pain

Most people (63%) said they'd talked to a doctor or health care professional about their pain. Nine out of 10 of them said they thought the doctor or health expert had understood them "very well" or "somewhat well."

However, fewer people (59%) said they'd gotten at least a "good amount" of pain relief after consulting their doctor.

More than eight out of 10 people said they felt they had at least some control over their pain. Another 11% said they had "hardly any" or "no control at all" over pain.

Pain Relief Resources Tried

The survey also covered pain-relief methods. Here are those results, with the percentage of people who said they'd tried each one:

- Over-the-counter drugs: 84%
- Home remedies: 81%
- Prescription drugs: 60%
- Bed rest: 58%
- Prayer: 58%
- Chiropractic: 28%
- Massage: 28%
- Homeopathy: 16%
- Yoga: 14%
- Alcohol: 12%
- Marijuana: 6%
- Acupuncture: 5%

Most people who reported trying those methods said they worked well. However, there weren't enough users of acupuncture or marijuana to get feedback in those areas.

Of the people who said they used prescription pain medications, nearly one in five (19%) said they used them on a daily basis. Most people (66%) said they used them less than once a month.

As for the most common remedy -- over-the-counter drugs -- 33% said they used them every day or at least once a week.

The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3%.

SOURCES: ABC News/*USA Today*/Stanford University Medical Center poll. News release, Stanford University.

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