



dear nurse



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How to Report Pain to Healthcare Professionals

Time with a healthcare professional is often limited. It's easy to forget something when you see them. My suggestions below should enable you to remember all aspects of the pain you are experiencing and help the healthcare professional make a diagnosis.

You can follow the P, Q, R, S, T, U Assessment to help remember topics to cover with your healthcare professional.

Generalised Pain

- » **P** – **Pain** rating out of 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain you have felt)
- » **Q** – What is the **quality** of the pain, for example, throbbing, stabbing, aching, stinging?
- » **R** – Where does the pain **radiate** to and from, and does anything make the pain better or worse? If you have tried any pain relief of any kind you may have bought over the counter or which had been previously prescribed, let the healthcare professional know which one.
- » **S** – When did the pain **start**? Ensure if you have just left hospital following surgery to let the healthcare professional know.

- » **T** – Is there anything which you are doing at the **time** when the pain comes on, for example eating, moving, or a particular activity? Do any other signs or symptoms accompany the pain? Such as a temperature, swelling, discolouration, nausea and vomiting for example. If you have a temperature, ring 111 for advice.
- » **U** – What is your **understanding** of the pain? What do you think the pain is caused by? Some people have some idea.

Have a list of the medications you are on and the doses you take, as it is always harder to remember if you do not have this to hand.

By having all this ready for when you see the healthcare professional will help clarify the symptom that you have.

A symptom is not seen by the healthcare professional but felt by the individual, so it helps to describe this fully.

Things a healthcare professional can see are signs i.e., Blood pressure reading, pulse, respiratory rate, discolouration, swelling.



Abdominal Pain

Abdominal Pain needs to be treated with particular caution. So if you use the PQRSTU process when experiencing abdominal pains, here are some additional things to consider, particularly under the 'R, S & T' parts of the assessment.

- » **R** – Where on your tummy is the pain? Near the stoma? Near a wound site? Indicate the area where the pain is located and if it radiates anywhere else let the healthcare professional know. If the pain is around the stoma itself, see the following section on peristomal pain.

- » **S** – Is the abdominal pain sudden onset or a continual ache? When did the pain start – was it after doing anything in particular? Were you having a meal with fatty foods, for example?

- » **T** – What was your stoma output like at the time that you had pain? Consistency, colour, amount and is there any visible blood or black content in the output?

Please note:
The following scenarios would be a considered an emergency requiring an urgent visit to A&E:

- » If you have blood or black output from your stoma,
- » If your stoma is not working and you are being sick, as it is likely you have a blockage.



Peristomal Pain

Similar to abdominal pain, there are additional things to consider if you are experiencing pain around the stoma. Again, under 'R, S & T' of the assessment.

- » **R** – Where around your stoma is the pain? Is it to one side or all around the stoma? Indicate the area where the pain is located and if it radiates anywhere else, let the healthcare professional know.
- » Are there any changes to surface of your skin near the stoma? Your skin around the stoma should look like the skin on the other side of your tummy. What does the skin feel like around the stoma, is it hard and painful in a specific area?
- » Do you have a temperature, swelling, discolouration, nausea and vomiting for example? If so, you should call 111.
- » **S** – Is the pain around your stoma sudden onset or a continual ache? Does the pain start during the day when you are mobile, or do you experience it at night also? Do you have any other signs or symptoms? Has the output changed?
- » **T** – What were you doing when it came on? Were you changing a pouch and cleaning around the area, or eating, moving, or doing a particular activity?



Other Things to Consider

Food and Drink

Are you able to eat and drink, and if so, what are you consuming? Are you having enough to drink as advised by your nurse, GP or consultant?

Passing Urine

Are you able to pass urine and is your urine a pale-yellow colour or is it darker? It may be that you are dehydrated. If you are unable to pass urine, this is a medical emergency, and you will need to ring 111 or attend A&E.

Other Symptoms

Do you have any other symptoms like swollen ankles, breathlessness or feel shaky? If in doubt ring 111 for advice. Be clear with them regarding your signs and symptoms.

Having said all this, I hope you do keep well, but if you do have pain, I hope my suggestions help you with future discussions concerning pain with your healthcare professional.

This article does not cover all pain types, but if you are experiencing any of the following, it's important you ring 999, as they are signs of a heart attack:

- » chest pain, pressure, heaviness, tightness or squeezing across the chest.

