

SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for what you need. Chronic pain can be confusing for both health care providers and patients alike so how you communicate your needs, and your pain experience in general, can impact the care and treatment you receive. Self-advocacy also means knowing your rights and about your pain condition so that you can be an “active manager” in your health. The goal of self-advocacy is finding the path you want to take within the health care system and the support you need to get there. With good self-advocacy skills, you can be more confident in taking responsibility and control over your pain management.

Here are some tips for building self-advocacy skills:

BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR PAIN

- Keep in mind pain is something that science and health care providers often have difficulty measuring. It varies from person to person and often can't be seen from the outside.
- Don't down-play your pain because you feel like you're complaining or that your situation is not that bad in comparison to others.
- Your doctor needs to hear what your individual pain experience is like and how it impacts your life.
- If you aren't able to tell your doctor how pain affects you, the treatment options they provide may be more limited and may not be appropriate for your pain levels.

INFORMATION IS POWER

- Learn about your pain condition and the treatments that are available.
- It can be easier to make good decisions about your pain management if you have the confidence to speak with your doctor knowing more about your options.
- There are some a number of different online resources and organizations that provide support and tools to help with pain self-management. www.painbc.ca and www.liveplanbe.ca are great resources to start with.

BE AN “ACTIVE MANAGER” IN YOUR HEALTH

- Keep track of your pain symptoms and monitor your response to treatments.
- If you are aware of the patterns and triggers associated with your pain, it can help your doctor or other health care provider work with you to find the best pain management plan.
- Take your records to your medical appointments so that you can offer good information about how you're progressing.
- When you clearly communicate information about your pain management experiences, you're helping your doctor help you.

DON'T DO IT ON YOUR OWN

- Being a self-advocate does not mean you have to speak up for yourself by yourself.
- If you have family members or other loved ones in your life who are understanding and supportive, consider taking them along with you to appointments for support.

RESOURCES

- <https://liveplanbeplus.ca/>
- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/communication-strategies/tips-for-talking-with-healthcare-providers>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-advocate-for-pain-management>
- <https://arthritis.ca/support-education/navigating-through-arthritis/self-advocacy-guide>
- <https://www.painbc.ca/get-involved/take-action>