

Asking about symptoms

Pain is one of the commonest symptoms.

For headaches, a doctor would expect to establish most of the features below. Similar questions can be used for other forms of pain.

Feature	Typical question
Main Site	Where does it hurt? Show me where it hurts.
Radiation	Does it go anywhere else?
Character	Can you describe the pain?
Precipitating factors	Does anything bring them on?
Time of onset	When do they start?
Time of resolution	When do they stop?
Frequency	How often do you get them?
Aggravating factors	Does anything make them worse? Is there anything else that affects them?
Relieving factors	Does anything make them better?
Associated features	Do you feel anything else wrong when it's there? Have you any other problems related to the pain?
Duration	How long do they last?
Severity	How bad is it?

Description of pain

Patient's description of pain	Explanation
aching / an ache	a general pain, often in muscles and joints
boring	like a drill
burning	with heat
colicky	an intermittent pain which varies in intensity, comes and goes in waves
crampy/cramp	an involuntary spasmodic muscle contraction
crushing	a feeling of pressure
dull	a background pain, opposite of sharp
gnawing	biting
gripping	a feeling of tightness
scalding	like boiling water
sharp	acute
stabbing	like a knife
stinging	sharp, burning, like an insect sting
throbbing	with a pulse or beat