

Trade association warns 18 million Brits living with pain not to avoid medical treatment because of COVID

As COVID cases peak and 1 in 4 reportedly faces restrictions – the MSKPN warns 18 million pain sufferers to seek medical treatment should lockdown hit.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Trade association warns 18 million Brits living with pain not to avoid medical treatment because of COVID

Study from first lockdown revealed three quarters did not seek treatment and over a third of pain sufferers 'self-medicated' to avoid burdening the NHS



Stephanie manages her pain by walking with her dog, Ozzy

As nationwide COVID-19 cases continue to peak and one in four Brits are reportedly facing local restrictions – experts from [the Musculoskeletal Partners Network \(MSKPN\)](#) are warning the UK's 18 million pain sufferers to seek medical treatment for their ailments should a second national lockdown hit.

The advice comes as the trade association, whose members include physiotherapists, osteopaths and chiropractors, reveals the worrying findings of a study into the musculoskeletal (MSK) health of 2000 people during the first lockdown. Of those polled, more than half (57%) suffered with pains, strains or discomfort across areas including in their joints, limbs, hips, back, neck, knees, shoulders, ligaments, muscles or with MSK conditions such as arthritis.

When asked how they treated their conditions, almost three quarters (73%) did not seek any treatment during lockdown. 36% said it was because they self-medicated, 35% didn't want to overburden the NHS with a low priority issue and 33% didn't want to attend a healthcare setting due to exposure to COVID-19.

Andrew Walton, co-founder and chair of MSKPN, says: "Our study shows three quarters of those with pain in the UK – that's around 13.5 million people - could potentially be avoiding treatment



Three quarters of those with pain could be avoiding treatment because of COVID. With the threat of a second lockdown looming it's terrifying to think people could be choosing to self-medicate.”

*Andrew Walton, co-founder
and chair of MSKPN*

because of COVID. With the threat of a second nationwide lockdown looming and local restrictions already in force, it is terrifying to think such a big chunk of society could be suffering in silence – choosing to self-medicate to mask their pain and avoiding medical intervention.

“While they may have thought they were helping the NHS by not seeking guidance, in the long run they are risking long-term health issues. Plus, the knock-on implications for the NHS could be mammoth, especially as we already know that waiting lists for operations, which includes millions of routine hip and knee procedures, is set to reach 10 million people by the end of the year.

“The figure that one third of those with pain, approximately six million people in the UK, may choose to self-medicate rather than get professional help is also a huge red flag. A study released last autumn found that one in four people were taking “addictive medicines” - we hope, by shining a light on the problem, these people will now get the treatment they desperately need, instead of reaching for the medicine cabinet.”

Stephanie Preston, 49, from Uxbridge, Middlesex knows only too well how easy it is to fall into an unhealthy relationship with medication. Suffering with chronic pain for over 20 years and being diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2004, the mother of two spent years trying different prescribed drugs to help manage her pain.

“At one point I felt I was living in a drug-hazed life,” Stephanie recalls. “I remember friends and family visiting and I would fall asleep because my medication was so strong. Then there were the side effects – allergic reactions, sickness and even hospital trips because one treatment resulted in blocked bowels, which can be really dangerous.”

Taking matters into her own hands, Stephanie joined a pain management programme and now has a series of tools she uses to help with her daily pain battles. Now, she only takes one tablet before bed to help relax her muscles while she sleeps. “I knew I had to take ownership because no-one was going to do it for me. Since then my whole attitude has changed, and I can manage my pain thanks to mindfulness and coping techniques, instead of expecting a magic tablet to make it all better,” Stephanie explains.

During lockdown, Stephanie, who works for the Home Office and is a Mental Health first aider, maintained her daily exercise through regular walks with her labradoodle, Ozzy. Stephanie is concerned others may choose to self-medicate rather than bother the NHS if the UK goes into a second national lockdown. Her advice: “Never underestimate how important walking is and be present in the moment. When I walk, I really take in my surroundings - I listen for the birds and

pay attention to the scenery, it helps take my mind off my pain.”

Andrew Walton, who also founded community healthcare provider Connect Health over three decades ago, concludes: “Stories like Stephanie’s highlight how easy it is to become overly reliant on medication, sometimes with really damaging consequences.

“We know now is a scary and uncertain time for many people, but help is out there, and new innovations are now available like the [C-Chart tool, which helps clinicians weigh up the risk of COVID versus the](#) support the patient needs. Tools like this are both reassuring for those requiring treatment and for the healthcare professional and will ensure that the safest route to treatment, which could include a face-to-face consultation under stringent safety measures, is found.”

The study also found that more than a fifth (22%) of respondents admitted that their condition worsened during lockdown, over a quarter (26%) feel weaker/less well physically now than before lockdown and 26% said they felt more stressed and less in control during lockdown.

[Full findings of the report can be viewed and downloaded here.](#)

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