

7. Should you rely on social media for pain management advice?

Daniel, 35, had been working from home since the pandemic began. After months hunched over his laptop, a nagging pain appeared in his right shoulder. Searching for answers, he opened his favourite social media app and typed 'shoulder pain courses'.

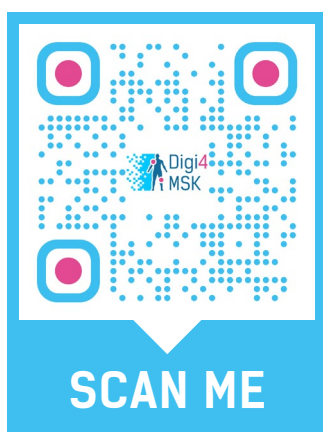
Within minutes, he was flooded with videos. One influencer claimed the pain came from a "short upper trapezius muscle." Another insisted it was an "elevated shoulder caused by emotional stress." A third warned about "visceral tension from the liver referring pain to the shoulder." Others talked about "fascia stuck to the ribs" and promoted devices or massages to "release" it.

Daniel tried several of the suggested routines—pressing a tennis ball under his shoulder, stretching the "short" muscles, even following a detox recipe "to reduce inflammation." Some days it seemed to help; others it made things worse.

When the pain spread down his arm, he told a colleague, who happened to be a physiotherapist. She listened and asked, "Did any of those people explain how they know what's happening inside your shoulder?" He paused. None of them had. Their videos were confident but vague—no context.

That evening, Daniel watched the same videos again but saw them differently. The bold claims now sounded less like science and more like marketing. He decided it was time to get real advice from someone qualified.

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Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Identifying unverified or misleading explanations often spread on social media.
- Learning how to check who is behind online health content and what evidence supports it.
- Knowing where to find trustworthy information for understanding and managing shoulder pain.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/ICSfkm1LZrU>

7.1. What is the problem with social media health advice?

Not all social media advice is backed up by science and there is no standard or ethical board that approves advice on social media. Therefore, you should always consider the risk that advice may be inaccurate, unhelpful or even dangerous.

1. Social media lacks proof and scientific accuracy because anyone can post personal content that can be misleading or false.
2. It is often based on personal experience. What works for one person's pain may not work for another.
3. Some are used to promote pain treatments without scientific evidence. Many posts are aimed at selling products or exercise-based methods, disguising their commercial purposes. A classic trick is to have you do a test or questionnaire and afterwards tell you what you "need" to become healthy. Most of these tests are unable to detect relevant changes or identify problems in individuals. The tests that are reliable should be used by your healthcare provider who also knows the rest of your story and understands what you want to achieve.
4. Pain management should be personalised, as it is a personal experience. Avoid "one-size-fits-all" solutions!

7.2. How to identify reliable pain management information online?

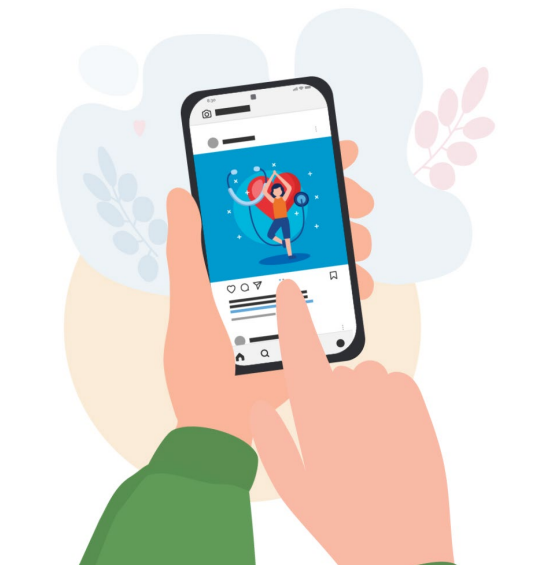
To avoid misinformation, keep these tips in mind when seeking health advice on the internet about pain management:

1. Verify that the information comes from an independent and authorised healthcare professional, a research body or government health agency.
2. See if the information on pain management is accompanied by links to scientific studies and if they align with national or international guidelines published by accredited or governmental agencies.
3. Be critical if something sounds too good to be true!
4. Before following advice, you can consult your trusted healthcare professional specialized in pain.

7.3. Where to find trustworthy pain management advice?

In addition to using social media sites that are trusted and verified by your healthcare professional, you can try other trusted sources:

1. Government health websites: organizations like the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention provide reliable information.
2. Medical institutions: the websites from hospitals, universities, and research centres have good insights. For example, World Health Organization has useful information about different types of pain.
3. Licensed healthcare professionals: doctors, physical therapists, and pain specialists can give you personalized and accurate advice.



Takeaway messages:

Social media can be a place to learn, but it should not be your main source of pain management information. Check information with trusted sources and always talk to a healthcare professional before making decisions related to your health. By thinking carefully and getting advice from people you trust, you can manage your pain safely and effectively!