

## 9. Can your culture affect how you feel or manage pain?

Amina, 54, moved from Morocco to Denmark more than twenty years ago. She works as a home caregiver and spends long hours helping older patients dress and move. Lately, her own lower back has been bothering her. She often wakes with stiffness that eases as the day goes on.

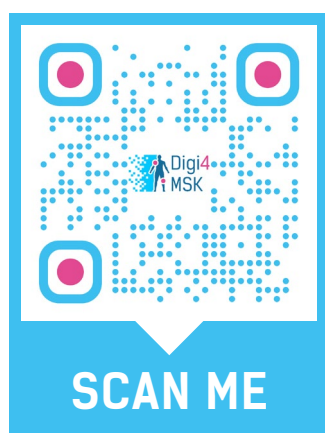
At work, she hides it. *"I'm fine"*, she tells her colleagues when they ask, smiling through the discomfort. In her family, pain has always been something to endure quietly. Growing up, she was taught that complaining means weakness—and that strong people do not burden others with their pain.

When the pain worsened after a busy month, her daughter insisted she see a doctor. Amina hesitated. *"What if they think I'm exaggerating?"*, she said, *"Back home, people just keep going"*. At the clinic, she struggled to explain exactly how it felt. The doctor spoke kindly but quickly, using words she did not fully understand. She nodded anyway, afraid of seeming impolite.

That evening, she talked with a friend from her community who had similar pain but described a very different approach: *"In my country, people talk about pain openly—it's normal to ask for help"*. Amina realized that how she spoke about pain was not just personal—it was part of her culture.

For the first time, she began to wonder how beliefs, upbringing, and language shape the way people express and manage pain.

Can your culture affect how you feel or manage pain?



### Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding how cultural beliefs and traditions influence the way people interpret and express pain.
- Recognizing that communication styles and expectations about pain differ across cultures.
- Learning how to talk about pain openly with healthcare professionals to get the right support.

**YouTube link:** <https://youtu.be/dRZ4ZLV03j4>

## 9.1. Why do your beliefs and traditions matter in managing pain?

People's beliefs and traditions can affect how they manage pain in many ways. For example:

- **What you believe causes pain:** In your culture, you might believe pain comes from aging, certain foods, or even spiritual reasons. These beliefs shape how you interpret and experience your own pain.
- **How you express pain:** Some traditions teach people to be quiet and strong when in pain, while others encourage showing it openly. Remember that no one can know exactly how you feel, and it takes practice to explain it so that others understand it. But once you learn to communicate how pain affects you, others can start to play a more active role in helping you.
- **How you cope with pain:** You may have traditional ways of dealing with pain, like using specific home remedies, family practices, or visiting traditional healers. However, it is beneficial for you to seek second opinions provided by healthcare professionals.
- **If you seek help and when you seek it:** Your traditions might influence whether you believe it is right to see a healthcare professional for pain, or if it is something you should just endure. If you experience that your healthcare professional does not understand you, try to talk about why you believe your behaviour is helpful and ask why their advice can be useful.

Because of these differences, sometimes healthcare professionals might not fully understand what you are going through, or the advice they give might not perfectly fit your way of life. Your healthcare professional wants to respect your background and work with you.



## 9.2. How to talk about your pain with your healthcare professional and share your beliefs?

1. **Be open about what you are feeling:** Tell your healthcare professional about your pain, and how it affects your daily life. Do not hide or minimize your pain, even if your tradition encourages stoicism. Your healthcare professional needs an honest picture of your discomfort to offer the best care and support.
2. **Share your beliefs and traditions about pain:** This is very important. Tell your healthcare professional what you believe is causing your pain, or what you have learned from your family or community about it. For example, "In my culture, we believe back pain is normal when you get older," or "My family uses this herb for headaches." This helps your healthcare professional to get a better understanding of your perspective.
3. **Describe how you usually cope:** Explain the methods you have tried or usually use to deal with pain, whether they are traditional practices, home remedies, or just your everyday approach. Sharing this helps your healthcare professional understand your coping style and suggest treatments that align with it.
4. **Ask questions and share your preferences:** Your healthcare professional wants to work *with* you to find the best way to manage your pain. If a suggested treatment does not align with your beliefs or traditions, please say so. Ask questions and discuss your concerns openly. Your preferences are crucial for creating a plan that truly fits your life and values.

### Takeaway messages:

It is completely natural for people from different backgrounds to have different beliefs about pain and health. Your healthcare professional's goal is to help you feel better and they respect your individual story. By openly sharing your beliefs and traditions about pain, you help your healthcare professional provide the most effective and respectful care for you.