geriatric pain.org

Verbal Descriptor Scale – Iowa Pain Thermometer-Revised

Use the Iowa Pain Thermometer-Revised to assess pain intensity for persons able to self report. Self-report of pain is defined as the ability to indicate presence and/or severity of pain verbally, in writing, or by other means such as finger span, pointing, head movement, or blinking eyes to answer yes or no questions.

Research indicates this tool is the best choice for most older adults including those with mild to moderate cognitive impairment. This scale requires either verbal ability or the ability to point to the image on the scale that most closely represents their pain.

How to Use: Ask the older adult to either point to, circle or state the words on the thermometer or the number which best indicates the pain they are experiencing at that moment. The rating scale indicates no pain to the most intense pain imaginable.

Evaluate the pain intensity over time to determine the effectiveness of pain treatments and need for changes in treatment.

Documentation: Document/record all scores or words in a location that is readily accessible to others on the health care team.

Revised November 2023

Reference

Booker SQ, Herr KA, Horgas AL. A Paradigm Shift for Movement-based Pain Assessment in Older Adults: Practice, Policy and Regulatory Drivers. Pain Manag Nurs. 2021 Feb;22(1):21-27. doi: 10.1016/j.pmn.2020.08.003. Epub 2020 Sep 15. PMID: 32948452; PMCID: PMC7886935.

Horgas, A., Bruckenthal, P., Chen, S., Herr, K., Young, H. & Fishman, S. (2022). Pain assessment in older adults-supporting family caregivers. *American Journal of Nursing. 122* (12), 42-48. doi: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000904092.01070.20.

Verbal Descriptor Scale – Iowa Pain Thermometer-Revised

Circle a number on the Pain Thermometer below that best represents the intensity of your pain right now.

10 — The Most Intense Pain Imaginable

9 ⎫
8 ⎬ Severe Pain
7 ⎭

6 ⎫
5 ⎬ Moderate Pain
4 ⎭

3 ⎫
2 ⎬ Mild Pain
1 ⎭

0 — No Pain