

Standing Strong

The Impact of Pain on America's Workforce



Standing Strong

is a national initiative designed to spotlight the everyday impact of pain on America's workforce, particularly those working on their feet at least some of the time, including first responders, food service/hospitality workers, teachers, retail workers, tradespeople/laborers, and active military.



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Research Methodology

The *Standing Strong: The Impact of Pain on America's Workforce* survey was commissioned by Pacira BioSciences, Inc. and conducted by [Wakefield Research](#) among 1,000 U.S. adults, employed full time, working on their feet at least some of the time, between April 17th and May 3rd, 2026, using an email invitation and an online survey. Quota set for minimum of 100 respondents in each of the following 6 roles:



First Responders



Retail Workers



Food Service/Hospitality



Tradespeople/Laborers



Teachers



Active Military

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation.

The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1 percentage points for the total sample, 9.6 percentage points for first responders, 8.6 percentage points for food service/hospitality, 9.3 percentage points for teachers, 8.6 percentage points for retail workers, 8.8 percentage points for tradespeople/laborers, and 9.8 percentage points for active military from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

Key Findings

For millions of workers, pain isn't an interruption. **It's part of the job.**



85%

experience pain at least sometimes while on the job



More than

4 in 10

workers report often or always experiencing pain while working

Workers don't speak up; **they push through.**



Nearly

90%

say they typically push through pain rather than ask for help



4 in 10

workers avoid reporting pain

due to job or perception concerns, highlighting a workplace culture where pain is often normalized or hidden

Why Workers Stay Silent

Workers aren't just experiencing pain, they're often hiding it.



81%

have concealed pain from supervisors or colleagues



41%

worry speaking up could affect their job security



39%

don't want to appear weak or unable to do their job

Women

are more likely than men

to strongly agree that they typically push through pain rather than speak up



56%



43%



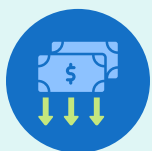
Pushing through pain comes at a cost.

Workers push through pain to stay on the job, but over time, the physical toll leads to missed work, lost income, and stalled career growth.



42%

report missing 1-3 days of work due to pain in the past 30 days



54%

report losing income due to missed shifts or reduced hours



46%

say pain has prevented them from pursuing career-advancing opportunities

Pain Isn't Just an Aging Issue

Workers under 45 were more likely than older workers to report missed work, lost income, and missed career opportunities because of pain.

	<45 yrs	45+ yrs
Missed 1-3 days of work due to pain in the past 30 days	48%	30%
Lost income	57%	47%
Missed career opportunities	51%	35%

Workers aren't just managing pain on the job, **it follows them home.**



Nearly

6 in 10

say pain negatively impacts their social lives and personal relationships



75%

among those who miss work due to pain say it affects their personal lives



The impact is especially pronounced in roles that require constant movement and long hours on their feet, such as **retail, hospitality, and military service**

Key Findings: Pain Prevalence

Knee pain is at the center of the issue.

Not all pain is equal. Knee pain is a major driver of limitation, mobility issues, and long-term impact.

74%

report knee pain as the most commonly affected area

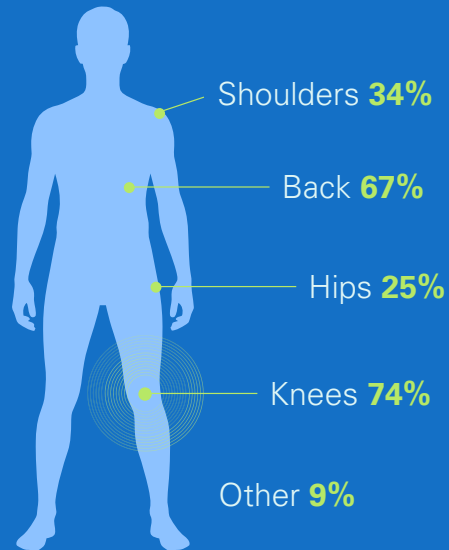
56%

More than half experience chronic knee pain*

66%

with knee pain say it negatively affects their social lives and personal relationships

Workers reported experiencing pain in:



*Chronic knee pain is defined as pain lasting three months or longer.



Did you know?

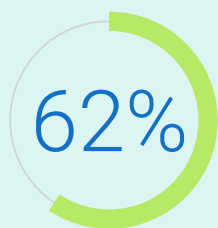
Knee osteoarthritis (OA) is a leading cause of chronic knee pain, affecting nearly **15 million Americans**.¹

1. Deshpande, B. R., Katz, J. N., Solomon, D. H., Yelin, E. H., Hunter, D. J., Messier, S. P., Suter, L. G., & Losina, E. (2016). Number of Persons With Symptomatic Knee Osteoarthritis in the US: Impact of Race and Ethnicity, Age, Sex, and Obesity. *Arthritis care & research*, 68(12), 1743–1750. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acr.22897>



Workers are relying on what's available – not the alternative options they're interested in. Pain is often managed with short-term solutions, even as workers show strong interest in long-lasting, non-opioid options that better align with their needs.

Current Pain Management Approaches

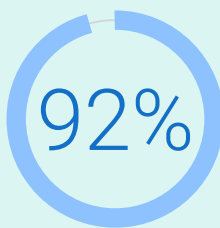


rely on over-the-counter (OTC) medications



use prescription opioids to manage pain

Interest in Long-Lasting, Non-Opioid Options



would consider a long-lasting, non-opioid treatment option

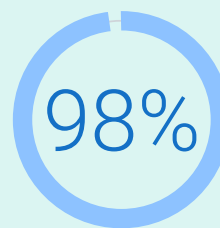
Among workers living with chronic knee pain, these numbers are even higher:



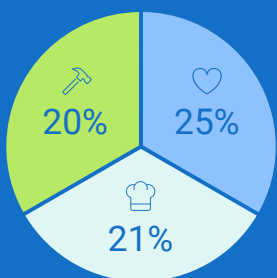
rely on OTC medications



use prescription opioids



would consider a long-lasting, non-opioid treatment option



Prescription opioid use varies across professions, with higher reported use among frontline roles such as first responders (25%), food service workers (21%) and labor workers (20%).



Key Findings: Occupational Impact

Would workers choose a different path?

Many in physically demanding professions say yes.

55%

say they would choose a less physically demanding career if given the chance



73%

of active military respondents



51%

of tradespeople/laborers



55%

of first responders



48%

of retail workers



55%

of food service/hospital workers



43%

of teachers

Closing

Pain may be part of the job today, but it doesn't have to define the future of America's workforce.

Workers are actively seeking **better, long-lasting ways to manage pain.**



Learn More





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