

Pain words stand out more for those experiencing it

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Nurse gives injection to woman, New Orleans, 1941. Credit: Wikipedia.

Ache, agony, distress and pain draw more attention than non-pain related words when it comes to people who suffer from chronic pain, a York University research using state-of-the-art eye-tracking technology has found.

"People suffering from [chronic pain](#) pay more frequent and longer attention to pain-related words than individuals who are pain-free," says Samantha Fashler, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Health and the lead author of the study. "Our eye movements—the things we look at—generally reflect what we attend to, and knowing how and what people pay attention to can be helpful in determining who develops chronic pain."

Chronic pain currently affects about 20 per cent of the population in Canada.

The current study, "More than meets the eye: visual attention biases in individuals reporting chronic pain", published in the *Journal of Pain Research*, incorporated an eye-tracker, which is a more sophisticated measuring tool to test [reaction time](#) than the previously used dot-probe task in similar studies.

"The use of an eye-tracker opens up a number of previously unavailable avenues for research to more directly tap what people with chronic pain attend to and how this attention may influence the presence of pain," says Professor Joel Katz, Canada Research Chair in Health Psychology, the co-author of the study.

The researchers recorded both reaction time and eye movements of chronic pain (51) and pain-free (62) participants. Both groups viewed neutral and sensory pain-related words on a dot-probe task. They found reaction time did not indicate [attention](#), but "the [eye-tracking technology](#) captured eye gaze patterns with millimetre precision," according to Fashler. She points out that this helped researchers to determine how frequently and how long individuals looked at sensory pain words.

"We now know that people with and without chronic pain differ in terms of how, where and when they attend to pain-related words. This is a first

step in identifying whether the attentional bias is involved in making pain more intense or more salient to the person in pain," says Katz.

More information: [www.dovepress.com/more-than-me ... reviewed-article-JPR](http://www.dovepress.com/more-than-me...reviewed-article-JPR)

Provided by York University

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