Intolerance of uncertainty—a byproduct of cognitive bias and error, which are elements of the normal functioning of the human mind—can increase physical limitations and pain intensity across diagnoses, independent of demographic and social factors.

Strategies to mitigate patients’ IoU, perhaps including cognitive behavioral therapy and its derivatives, should be evaluated in the future.

People who have a high intolerance of uncertainty (IoU) generally overestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes and resist accepting that adverse outcomes might occur.

IoU is more common in people with high levels of health anxiety and increased threat perception.

IoU may cause patients to feel more ill and make choices inconsistent with their values, but little is known about it in patients with musculoskeletal conditions.

After controlling for sociodemographic factors, as IoU increased, physical function decreased.

After controlling for level of education, as IoU increased, pain intensity increased.

Multivariable analysis evaluated the association between higher levels of IoU on patients’ physical function and pain levels after controlling for relevant social, demographic, and economic confounding variables.

139 patients with upper-extremity conditions completed the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS-12) and patient-reported physical function measure or questionnaire.

Survey of social, economic, and demographic background was also used.

Physical function and pain intensity were measured.

As IoU increased, physical function decreased and pain intensity increased.

How does IoU affect magnitude of physical function and pain intensity?