

READING

The Woman Who Doesn't Feel Pain

Jo Cameron only notices her skin is burning when she smells something strange. She often burns her arms on the oven but does not feel pain.

Jo is one of only two people in the world who have a rare genetic mutation. This means she feels almost no pain and never feels anxious or afraid.

Jo only discovered she was different when she was 65 years old. After a big surgery, doctors were surprised she did not need painkillers.

When Jo had surgery on her hand, doctors warned her about pain. But she felt nothing. Her anaesthetist, Dr Devjit Srivastava, sent her to experts at University College London and Oxford University. Tests showed that Jo had special genes that made her feel less pain than most people.

Not Just "Very Healthy"

Jo, who lives near Inverness, Scotland, told the BBC that doctors didn't believe her at first. She said: "We joked before the surgery because I told them I wouldn't need painkillers. After surgery, when I didn't take any, the doctor checked my medical history. He saw I had never needed painkillers before."

Jo thought she was just very healthy. She explained: "Looking back, I see I never needed painkillers. But if you don't need something, you don't ask why. I thought I was just a happy person who didn't feel different from anyone else."

Even during childbirth, Jo did not feel pain. She said: "It was strange but not painful. I actually enjoyed it."

Jo's Chili Challenge

Jo, her husband Jim, and Dr Srivastava tried the Scotch Bonnet chili challenge. While the men felt the heat and reacted, Jo just smiled. The spice didn't bother her at all.

Although Jo is happy with her condition, she says pain is important. "Pain warns you when something is wrong. For example, I didn't know my hip was damaged until I couldn't walk anymore because of arthritis."

Doctors think Jo might heal faster than most people. Her unique genes also make her forgetful and less anxious. She calls it her "happy gene" and jokes: "I've been happy and forgetful all my life—now I have an excuse!"

Could Jo's Genes Help Others?

Jo says she doesn't feel fear. For example, after a small car accident, she stayed calm while the other driver was very upset. She explained: "I don't get adrenaline. I don't feel fear—it's just not there."

Doctors believe Jo's case could lead to new medicines. Dr Srivastava says: "Many people feel pain after surgery, even with modern medicine. Studying Jo's genes might help us create better treatments. These could reduce pain and even help wounds heal faster."

Jo's story was published in the *British Journal of Anaesthesia*. Dr James Cox, one of the researchers, says:

"People like Jo can teach us a lot about pain. We hope to use these findings to help with post-surgery pain, anxiety, and even chronic pain or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the future."

Text adapted from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-47719718>

Activity 1. True or False. Read the statements below and decide if they are true or false. If any of them is false, you must justify your answer. (5 points)

1. Jo Cameron feels pain when she burns her skin
2. Jo discovered her condition when she was 45 years old.

3. Jo's anaesthetist sent her to specialists to study her condition
4. Jo felt pain during childbirth
5. Jo believes pain is important because it warns people about problems.

Activity 2. Multiple Choice. Choose the correct answer for each question (5 points).

1. What makes Jo different from most people?
 - a) She feels pain very strongly
 - b) She feels almost no pain
 - c) She is afraid of hospitals
 - d) She always takes painkillers
2. Why did Jo's anaesthetist send her to specialists?
 - a) Because she needed more medicine
 - b) Because she asked for help
 - c) Because she didn't feel pain after surgery
 - d) Because she had arthritis
3. What did doctors discover about Jo's genes?
 - a) Her genes are completely normal
 - b) Her genes make her feel stronger pain
 - c) Her genes help her forget things and stay calm
 - d) Her genes make her feel anxious
4. How did Jo react during the chili challenge?
 - a) She cried because the chili was too hot
 - b) She stayed calm and smiled
 - c) She refused to try the chili
 - d) She drank water immediately
5. What does Jo say about fear?
 - a) She often feels afraid
 - b) She feels fear only in dangerous situations
 - c) She doesn't feel fear at all
 - d) Fear helps her stay safe

Activity 3. Short Answer Questions. Answer the questions in 1-2 sentences (10 points).

1. How did Jo discover her condition?
2. Why does Jo think pain is important?
3. What happened when Jo tried the chili challenge?
4. What are some advantages of Jo's genetic mutation?
5. How could Jo's genes help others?