

## Living with a chronic illness - dealing with feelings

### Description

Learning that you have a long-term (chronic) illness can bring up many different feelings.

Learn about common emotions you might have when you are diagnosed and live with a chronic illness. Learn how to support yourself and where to go for more support.

### Getting Used to Chronic Illness

Examples of chronic illnesses are:

- Alzheimer disease and dementia
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Cancer
- COPD
- Crohn disease
- Cystic fibrosis
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Heart Disease
- HIV/AIDS
- Mood disorders (bipolar, cyclothymic, and depression)
- Multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson disease

It can be a shock to learn you have a chronic illness. You may ask "why me?" or "where did it come from?"

- Sometimes nothing can explain why you got the illness.
- The illness may run in your family.
- You may have been exposed to something that caused the illness.

As you learn more about your illness and how to take care of yourself, your feelings may change. Fear or shock may give way to:

- Anger because you have the illness
- Sadness or depression because you may not be able to live the way you used to
- Confusion or stress about how to take care of yourself

### Your Image of Yourself may Change

have an illness. Know that, with time, your illness will become part of you and you will have a new normal.

You will learn to live with your illness. You will get used to your new normal. For example:

- A person with diabetes may need to learn to test their blood sugar and give insulin several times a day. This becomes their new normal.
- A person with asthma may need to carry an inhaler and avoid things that may cause an asthma attack. This is their new normal.

## Expect to Feel Overwhelmed

You may be overwhelmed by:

- How much there is to learn.
- What lifestyle changes you need to make. For example, you may be trying to change your diet, quit smoking, and exercise.

## Be Gentle With Yourself

Over time, you'll adapt to living with your illness.

- Know that you will adapt over time. You will feel like yourself again as you learn how to fit your illness into your life.
- Know that what may be confusing at first starts to make sense. Give yourself time to learn how to take care of your illness.

## Feelings and Emotions Over Time

It takes a lot of energy to manage your chronic illness every day. Sometimes, this can affect your outlook and mood. Sometimes you may feel very alone. This is particularly true during times when your illness is harder to manage.

You may sometimes have the feelings you had when you first got the illness:

- Depressed that you have the illness. It feels like life will never be OK again.
- Angry. It still seems unfair that you have the illness.
- Afraid that you will become very ill over time.

These kinds of feelings are normal.

Stress can make it harder for you to take care of your chronic illness. You can learn to cope with stress to help you manage day to day.

Find ways to decrease stress that work for you. Here are some ideas:

- Go for a walk.
- Read a book or watch a movie.
- Try yoga, tai chi, or meditation.
- Take an art class, play an instrument, or listen to music.
- Call or spend time with a friend.

therapist might help you deal with the many feelings that come up. Ask your health care provider for help finding a therapist.

## Learn More About Your Illness

Know more about your illness so you can manage it and feel better about it.

- Learn how to live with your chronic illness. At first it might seem like it is controlling you, but the more you learn and can do for yourself, the more normal and in control you will feel.
- Find information on the Internet, at a library, and from social networks, support groups, national organizations, and local hospitals.
- Ask your provider for websites you can trust. Not all the information you find online is from reliable sources.

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