

## Living with a chronic illness - reaching out to others

### Description

A chronic illness is a long-term health condition that may not have a cure. 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

Living with chronic illness can make you feel very alone. Learn about staying connected with people to help you cope with your illness.

### Talk With People who Have the Same Illness

Sharing with and learning from people who have the same feelings as you can help you cope with your own illness.

- Find a support group in your area for people who have the same chronic illness as you. Many organizations and hospitals run support groups. Ask your health care provider how to find one. For example, if you have heart disease, the American Heart Association may offer or know of a support group in your area.
- Find an online group. There are online blogs and discussion groups about many topics, and you may find support this way.

### Tell Others About Your Chronic Illness

You may find it hard to tell others that you have a chronic illness. You may worry that they will not want to know about it or that they will judge you. You may feel embarrassed about your illness. These are normal feelings. Thinking about telling people can be harder than actually telling them.

People will react in different ways. They may be:

- Surprised

wrong thing. Let them know that there is no right way to react and no perfect thing to say.

- Helpful. They know someone else with the same illness so they are familiar with what is going on with you.

You may look and feel fine most of the time. But at some point, you may feel ill or have less energy. You may not be able to work as hard, or you may need to take breaks for self-care. When this happens, you want people to know about your illness so they understand what is going on.

Tell people about your illness to keep you safe. If you have a medical emergency, you want people to step in and help. For example:

- If you have epilepsy, your coworkers should know what to do if you have a seizure.
- If you have diabetes, they should know what the symptoms of low blood sugar are and what to do.

## Let People Help you

There may be people in your life who want to help you take care of yourself. Let your loved ones and friends know how they can help you. Sometimes all you need is someone to talk to.

You may not always want people's help. You might not want their advice. Tell them as much as you feel comfortable sharing. Ask them to respect your privacy if you don't want to talk about it.

If you attend a support group, you may want to take family members, friends or others along. This can help them learn more about your illness and how to support you.

If you are involved in an online discussion group, you might want to show family or friends some of the postings to help them learn more.

If you live alone and do not know where to find support:

- Ask your provider for ideas about where you can find support.
- See if there is an agency where you can volunteer. Many health agencies rely on volunteers. For example, if you have cancer, you may be able to volunteer at the American Cancer Society.
- Find out if there are talks or classes about your illness in your area. Some hospitals and clinics may offer these. This can be a good way to meet others with the same illness.

## Get Help With Your Daily Tasks

You may need help with your self-care tasks, getting to appointments, shopping, or household chores. Keep a list of people who you can ask for help. Learn to be comfortable accepting help when it is offered. Many people are happy to help and are glad to be asked.

If you do not know someone who can help you, ask your provider or social worker about different services that may be available in your area. You may be able to get meals delivered to your home, help from a home health aide, or other services.

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