8 Ways to Cope With Chronic Pain

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Coping With Chronic Pain

Day in and day out, your pain is present. Of course, there are mild fluctuations in intensity and types of pain to expect, and coping with chronic pain can be easier said than done some days.

Some mornings, you can barely get out of bed, as your pain is stiff and achy. Some nights, you head off to your room early as pain has depleted your resources with its burning and stinging feelings. No matter the kind of pain, there is one thing for sure: it sucks.

Part of what makes chronic pain such a challenging condition is its unrelenting nature. You might be able to gain some short-term relief from medication, but our bodies (and brains) struggle to adapt to the unwelcome sensation of pain.

It does not dull over time, and your body cannot compensate for the pain. It is here to stay. At times, it feels like it is worsening.

With this being true, your goal should not be to rid yourself of pain. Though tempting, that notion is impractical and likely to end with additional frustration, sadness and disappointment.

Instead, turn your sights towards coping. You cannot change your pain, but you can change the way you deal with chronic pain – both mentally and physically. Below are eight different ways you can go about coping with chronic pain.

A Guide to Coping With Chronic Pain

1. Accept Your State

Unfortunately, one of the most difficult coping skills is the first one you should commit to: acceptance. People often throw around the word without a good understanding of what acceptance is all about.

Acceptance is the clear and complete understanding of the situation you are in. You do not have to like the thing you accept; you just have to acknowledge that it is true.

Have you accepted your pain? Acceptance is hard to acquire because there is not a straight line between it and your diagnosis. You must first push past shock and denial, anger and confusion as you experience the emotional and physical pain before you readjust to your current state.

2. Alter Your Expectations

A major cause of stress is the gap between your current state and your expectations. Accepting your condition will

help to modify your expectations to a more reasonable level; to really limit the stress, you must establish a new view of yourself and your abilities.

There is no sense in expecting that you can still do what was once possible. Work towards creating a new self-image based on your current skills and talents.

Instead of having too much interest in what was possible in the past, build upon what remains. As long as your expectations are practical, your glass will be half full.

3. Find a Good Treatment Team

A chronic pain diagnosis is a significant event in your life. Significant events like this need the best care you can find from a team of treatment professionals.

The team approach is important because the multifaceted impact of pain will require a multidisciplinary team to adequately treat you.

A pain specialist, an endocrinologist, a rheumatologist, a psychiatrist and a mental health therapist are just a few options depending on the source of your pain. A primary care physician can act as a central point with whom the specialists confer.

4. Follow Your Team's Recommendations

If you do not feel good about your treatment team, you will be less likely to attend your appointments and follow their recommendations. This will not reduce your symptoms.

Since you trust them and feel comfortable in their care, follow their directions. Take your medications as indicated, and follow through with testing, lab work and other instructions.

Breaking from their orders will skew the information about the types of treatment provided. Staying the course and communicating the results is the way towards progress.

5. Practice Relaxation

Your pain will directly impact your mental health, so at least one mental health specialist should be part of your treatment team to teach you helpful techniques, like relaxation.

Relaxation comes in many different styles, so it will take some experimentation to find examples that are the best fit for you, your pain and your mental health needs.

Deep breathing will be a central method utilized often in other coping skills. To begin, simply sit or lay with one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. As you inhale slowly and deeply, focus on pushing out your stomach while leaving your chest and shoulders still — this allows for slowed respiration and heart rate.

6. Seek Distraction

Thinking too much about anything negative tends to create more negativity, so overly focusing on your pain will not aid your situation. To combat this trend, find methods of distraction throughout your day to escape your struggles.

Distractions will help to reduce stress while you break out of your monotonous routines. Be sure not to overindulge in distractions, though; in small doses, distractions will give you a fresh perspective; in excess, distraction becomes avoidance.

Distraction options include:

- Listening to music.
- Having a healthy snack.
- Watching a favorite movie.
- Spending time on the internet.
- Being with friends and loved ones.

7. Mindfulness

In many ways, mindfulness is the opposite of distraction. Mindfulness strives to enhance your awareness of yourself, your thoughts and your needs through a practice of self-awareness.

During mindfulness, you can tap into your senses to explore the sensations and feedback you are receiving. This might be something you have avoided because the physical pain is too great to bear, but try again — there is a chance exploring these sensations can give you a new understanding of your pain, what makes it better and what makes it worse.

8. Express Yourself

For countless mental and physical health problems, self-expression is a wonderful coping skill. You can write in a journal for chronic pain, paint, sing, dance, sew, whittle, bake, draw, mold, chisel and create in any other way imaginable.

Stressful situations can be overwhelming, and it can be challenging to know just what you think or feel about your pain. In this case, self-expression can aid in uncovering how you truly feel about your current status.

Self-expression can be for your benefit only, or a way to let others know how you feel. Depending on your level and type of pain, you might have to explore a new style of self-expression, but the practice will be a great source of stress and pain relief.