Marlene’s Chronic Pain

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Marlene’s Experiences With Chronic Pain and How She Copes

Many people suffer from chronic pain. Defined as pain lasting for longer than six months, it can range anywhere from mild to excruciating, episodic to continuous, mildly inconvenient to totally incapacitating. Chronic pain can significantly disrupt an individual’s everyday life and take both an emotional and physical toll.

As a retired medical professional, I can certainly relate and sympathize with chronic pain sufferers as I am one myself.

I have chronic pain in my cervical spine which causes neck pain as well as back pain in the mid to lower lumbar spine areas. Both result from osteoarthritis which I have had for about twenty years.

My chronic pain symptoms are quite common and probably much the same as others who have chronic pain. They include:

- Pain, ranging in severity from mild to severe, at times. It often does not subside.
- Pain described as burning, shooting or aching.
- General discomfort, stiffness, soreness or tightness.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Feeling more fatigued than one would normally feel, especially at the end of the day.
- Necessity to rest more frequently when performing daily tasks such as cleaning, gardening, etc.
- Having to avoid certain types of exercise (e.g. jogging, tennis, weight-lifting, etc.).

Suffering from chronic pain is definitely not much fun. I have tried many types of treatment over the years. I find that some methods are more beneficial than others. Of course, not every option works well for everyone.

Regardless of the type of chronic pain treatment, the main goal is to improve your overall level of functioning so you can work, go to school and take an active part in normal life activities.

There are a multitude of treatment options available for chronic pain sufferers. However, it is very important that you consult your doctor before trying any home remedies or exercise programs to make sure they will not cause any further damage or pain.

Below is a list of what seems to work best for me. It is by no means an exhaustive list:

- **Relaxation techniques:** I lie on my back and progressively relax all parts of my body, while listening to relaxation music.
- **Analgesics and anti-inflammatories:** I use the OTC pain medication acetaminophen (Tylenol) for mild to moderate pain. In addition, I am on a prescription anti-inflammatory known as Naproxen for severe bouts of pain. OTC Ibuprofen also works well but you should not take it if you are already taking a prescription anti-inflammatory.

- **Antidepressant/anti-anxiety drugs:** My doctor prescribed the antidepressant/anti-anxiety drug known as Cymbalta (duloxetine hydrochloride) for my lower back pain. It works very well.
- **Acupuncture/massage/chiropractic treatments:** I use a “trio” of natural treatments on a monthly basis to manage my chronic neck and back pain. I find my sessions of acupuncture, massage therapy and chiropractic adjustments very effective in keeping my chronic pain in check.
- **Heat/cold applications:** I regularly apply dry heat, to both my lower back and neck, in order to alleviate pain. When I suffer from more severe “flare-ups,” I switch to ice packs instead to decrease localized joint inflammation.
- **Exercise:** Different forms of exercise are very beneficial in relieving chronic pain associated with osteoarthritis. I find walking and Pilates work best for me. Walking is a weight-bearing exercise while Pilates concentrates on the core which strengthens the abdominal muscles. Both of these exercises aid in strengthening the back muscles thus relieving related pain.