Supporting Someone in Pain

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Living With a Loved One With Chronic Pain

It can be difficult to care for a person experiencing chronic pain. You can feel helpless having done all you can for your loved one and still seeing them suffer. This can lead to exhaustion and occasionally even resentment on the part of the caretaker. Burnout is very common for people who live with someone with pain that never leaves.

Here are some things to keep in mind when caring for a loved one with pain issues:

1. **Resist defining your loved one by their pain.** Living with chronic pain may disrupt any sense of normalcy, but it cannot dislodge dreams or ambitions. It may be hard for chronic pain sufferers to live as they used to, but they still want to be able to do the things they enjoyed despite the pain not allowing it.
2. **Do not assume a chronic pain sufferer is fine just because they say so.** They may attempt to hide it. People cannot really relate to having this sort of consistent, unrelenting pain. Fibromyalgia patients run into this frequently; people just can't understand that patients who otherwise look healthy can still claim to be in pain.
3. **There is a difference in being "happy" and being "healthy."** When you have a stomachache, you are miserable. People with chronic pain live daily with this level of misery, and for extended periods of time, and have developed coping mechanisms that don't let on how much hurt they carry with them. They may be smiling, but it doesn't mean they are pain-free.

4. **Try to understand them.** When your loved one says they are in pain, believe it! Many times they are just coping by acting as if nothing is wrong. They might nonetheless show the following signs when in pain:

    - grimacing
    - restlessness
    - irritability
    - mood swings
    - wringing hands
    - moaning
    - sleep disturbance
    - teeth grinding
    - poor concentration
    - decreased activity

5. **You really need to be in tune with a chronic pain sufferer's physical limitations.** And it will vary from day to day, with some days better than others.
6. **Leave your "pep talk" at home.** It can be aggravating, not to mention demoralizing, for your loved one.
7. **Never use throwaway lines.** Despite good intentions, it really is not supportive to say, "Well, that's life," or, "You have to deal with it," or even, "You just have to do your best." This distances you from them and only makes them feel worse.

8. **Don’t make them feel guilty**. Resist saying anything that provokes their guilt, which is easy to fall into if you’re feeling impatient. It isn’t fair, and it doesn’t help anyone.
9. **Take care of yourself.**If you are living with a chronic pain patient or supporting such a person, you need to have balance in your life. Make sure you have time for yourself as well.
10. **Keep asking your loved one to do things.** Many times you will get a “yes” just to have them cancel at the last minute. Over and over again. However, your loved one will appreciate your asking and some time it may be a go! A chronic pain sufferer does not know how they will be at any time. It is awful to be left out, though, so keep trying to engage them in something. It will work out eventually!