Isolation and Chronic Pain

by YVONNE BANKS

Avoiding Social Isolation With Chronic Pain

Many people with chronic pain stay within the confines of their home for days on end. Pain keeps them from going out, and doing the things they used to enjoy. It keeps sufferers in their beds or easy chairs because it makes the pain slightly more tolerable.

These people are often criticized for staying home by their family and friends. *"If he would just get out of the house into some sunshine, he'd feel better!"* is a typical comment one hears from the people in their lives that misunderstand chronic pain.

Chronic pain patients would love to be able to go outside and be social again, but the pain will become aggravated. Many sufferers find that the ensuring pain was not worth the outing; the next time, they may elect to stay home in attempt to keep pain at a tolerable level.

The Vicious Cycle

It is essential that these patients have social activity; without it, they may experience depression. Depression is not only a problem in itself; it increases the pain felt by the sufferer. It is often a vicious cycle that cannot be stopped - until there is an intervention.

How can this type of patient find enough social activity to provide benefit, but not exacerbate the pain symptoms? It is a matter of balance. It is up to the individual to determine how much is too much activity. This will require some experimentation by the person suffering from chronic pain, and the activities that he or she may be doing. The patient will have to determine if the activity is "worth it" for them in the future.

Therapeutic Intervention

It is very critical for a patient of chronic pain have a therapist available, so that there is at least one additional social connection. Hopefully, the therapist will offer additional opportunities for social interactions to help alleviate the loneliness that comes from long periods of staying isolated within the home. This will help a person with depression, and gives them something to look forward to.

It would behoove a chronic pain sufferer to enlist the help of a physical therapist. Exercise is important, even though a person is experiencing pain. It is important for the patient to exercise so that their mobility is improved in day-to-day activities. A physical therapist will know various types of exercises a person will be able to accomplish while experiencing minimal pain.

Some patients may need the help of a psychologist, to discuss their fears and anxiety related to physical activity. The mere thought of exercise may cause a person to become anxious, as they associate it with pain.

Conclusion

Break the cycle of social isolation and chronic pain by having social interactions of some kind. It could be a phone call from to a friend, or a visit to the park. Some people may benefit from having an Internet connection to contact people in the outside world. While this won’t necessarily get the chronic pain sufferer out of their house, it does offer social interaction. With Skype, for example, the patient can see and talk with whomever they like. Any attempt to create social interaction will prove helpful in deterring depression a person with chronic pain.