Chronic Pain and Intimacy

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Intimacy and Coping With Chronic Pain

Chronic pain can have a significant impact on a relationship. The person who suffers constantly from pain does not feel the same as he/she was before getting sick; fatigue, depressed moods and sleep problems are often associated with chronic pain. The partner may also feel overwhelmed and feel unable to handle the changes. Feelings of being trapped, losing control, and hopelessness can be experienced by both partners. Studies also confirm that marriages in which one partner has a chronic illness are more likely to fall apart.

Bettering your Life

If you suffer from chronic pain, you will have to take extra care not only of yourself, but your relationship, too. There are several things you can do to enjoy a better life, health and relationship with your partner.

Communication is the key

Lack of communication often leads to frustration and misunderstanding your spouse. You may have bad days when your pain is intense, and you have no energy. You may need to spend more time in bed. Other times you may put the effort to work, yet not see the results you want and get frustrated. If you don't tell your spouse what you experience, he may think you don't want to work or do your usual activities, and you may be perceived as careless, or even lazy. Don't let this happen. Talk to your partner and explain your symptoms, let him know how you feel, and ask for support.

Find solutions and always have a plan B

Find solutions together. Share your daily activities. You may want to ask a relative or family friend to help with some tasks. You may need to postpone several items from your "to do" list, until you feel better. An extra appointment to the doctor may be necessary, make arrangements with transportation. You may have to cancel a party, and rather spend time at home, and watch a movie. Always have a plan B in case your pain does not allow you to do everything you have planned.

Take good care of yourself

Take care of yourself and your needs first. This doesn't mean you are selfish, it means that you need first to achieve the best physical and emotional health you can have before trying to improve your relationship. Work with your healthcare professionals to get the best treatment for your pain.

Pay attention to what you eat. Some foods (i.e. fried foods, highly processed products) promote inflammation in the body, leading to more pain. On the other hand, a healthy clean diet based on fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy oils, whole grains, fish and lean meats have anti-inflammatory effects.

Stay active as much as you can, and adapt your fitness plan to your condition. The feel good chemicals released during workouts don’t fight depression only, but have true painkillers qualities as well.

Be kind with your emotions and make sure you state your needs. Ask your partner about his/her needs as well. Be clear about what you need and ask for help, without creating a sense of being dependant. Many pain suffers feel they become too dependent on others. You are equal partners; at times, you need extra help, while other times you could offer more support, it’s about finding a balance.