Enjoy Yourself Despite Pain

by ALI ESFAHANI

Enjoy Yourself at Events Despite Being in Pain

As human beings, socializing is such an important aspect of our nature. Socialization makes it possible for us to fully function as human beings. Without socialization, we could not have our society and culture. Most people find it enjoyable and something they take pleasure doing in their spare time.

The emotional and physical benefit of engaging with others is immeasurable. The benefits of socialization have been well documented; people who socialize experience lower stress, cope with adverse events better, and are generally healthier. On the other hand, a lack of socialization can lead to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

Attending special events, such as weddings, birthdays, and parties is usually something people look forward to. However, for chronic pain sufferers, it can be a monumental task. It can be hard to focus on enjoying events and hanging out with friends if one is consistently monitoring their own physical state. The pain not only takes a physical toll, but also impacts the manner in which one can interact with other people.

Attending events can be challenging because of the anxiety, lack of energy, and difficulty focusing. Living with chronic pain at home can be manageable because it is a controlled environment; you know where to sit, how to avoid the pain, and what could potentially trigger the pain. On the other hand, at events, a chronic pain sufferer doesn’t know how long they will have to stand, sit, or walk for. There is a fear that the social event will bring out the worst of their pain and set off a flare-up. It can be unnerving to enter the physical unknown, and for that reason some chronic pain sufferers will choose to avoid these types of events altogether.

It has been well documented that chronic pain can cause fatigue. The spoon theory by Christine Donato explains why people with a chronic illness have reduced amount of energy available for productive tasks. “Spoons” are used as an intangible unit of measurement to track how much energy a person has every day. Each activity costs a certain amount of spoons and won’t be replaced until the next day. Someone who runs out of spoons loses the ability to do anything other than rest. Disabled or ill people must plan their activities to ensure that every day is manageable because their disability uses up a lot of their spoons. Although socializing is very enjoyable, it can use up a lot of energy. For healthy people that is fine, but chronic pain sufferers often have a limited amount of energy. For this reason, some pain suffers simply don’t see going out as a realistic or worthwhile option.

The focus of special events is about being around friends or family and having a good time. However, it can be difficult to concentrate on your surroundings when your body is screaming at you constantly. On top of that, the fear and anxiety the pain brings can make it impossible to fully enjoy special events that take several hours.

There are social impacts of not being able to attend events because of chronic pain, including depression. Often times the result of missing an important social event due to the pain can lead to a depressed state. Depression and pain are linked in that one can perpetuate the other. So being sad about missing an event can lead to more pain; avoid loneliness by engaging in activities with friends and family members.

Fortunately, there are solutions to help chronic pain sufferers be able to not only attend events, but to also enjoy them: plan ahead, add structure to social events, and focus.

Plan Ahead

As a chronic pain sufferer, the best thing you can do if you want to enjoy yourself is plan ahead if you decide to go to a social event. Figure out the location of the event, how far of a drive it is, and if there is parking nearby. Try to bring along any medication, TENS units, heat pads, and other pain-alleviating methods just in case. Don't be afraid to ask if there are chairs available, or a place to stretch and relax briefly in case the pain gets bad. There is no harm in letting your friends and family know that some accommodations may be needed for you to happily attend the event. Keeping open communication with your friends and family can help make planning for social events even easier. Use your problem-solving skills to create solutions and avoid excuses.

Add Structure to Social Events

Social events need to be more structured for you in order to have a good time with the pain. Although socialization is encouraged and important, you should plan to attend social events that are within reason of your limitations. You will need to be wary of how you spend your time in social situations, in order to avoid fatigue and save energy. Some types of social events and activities are going to be more conducive than others; dinner and game-nights are more probably more conducive to a chronic pain sufferer than long rock concerts.

Focus

Although it may be hard to focus on being happy, one can try numerous methods during an event to help bring back the focus on socializing. Relaxation, positive visualization, and biofeedback can all be helpful methods of allowing one to ease the pain and retool their thinking. Each of these techniques can help train your body to relax muscles and reduce chemical stress responses that are harmful to your body. One might not be able to break out into full meditation during a social event, but a bathroom break or deepening one's breathing to relax is realistic.

Socializing is very important to humans in development and general well-being. Unfortunately, chronic pain can make enjoying important social events difficult. The pain can make it hard to focus on having a good time, increase anxiety towards the unknown, or sap one of their energy. Missing social events due to the pain can magnify the pain, increase the likelihood of depression, and make living with the pain seem that much harder. Fortunately, there are a couple of ways to combat the pain that may hamper the experience of attending important social events; planning ahead, adding structure to social events, and intense focus methods can all help one to improve the experience of attending an event despite the pain. Although chronic pain can make socializing more difficult, it definitely does not make it impossible.