

## TIPS FOR THE PAIN PATIENT

- Accept the fact that pain is a part of your life. This is a difficult thing to do, but it will allow you and your family to move forward.
- Medication alone often isn't the best form of treatment for chronic pain. Some pain medications can stimulate your nervous system, making it difficult to fall asleep. Rather than focusing on what medications you want given to you, to "make you" feel better, focus on what you and your family can do to make yourself feel better.
- Do daily exercise even if you don't feel like doing anything. This is important for body conditioning, as well as the mind. Exercising releases endorphins which can elevate your mood, decrease stress, and help you relax. This, in turn, helps you sleep better. As you build strength, your pain can decrease. Incorporate exercise into your family events. This can strengthen the bond between family members.
- Consider counseling for yourself and your spouse to help you discover ways to decrease stress and understand chronic pain.
- Do not talk about pain all the time. It keeps you focused on the pain rather than other things and it uses up energy. Talking about pain does not do anything to diminish it, and it increases stress for family members.
- Make an effort to do things with friends and family. This will help keep those relationships strong. Answer phone calls and letters and accept invitations. Take the initiative and call someone and invite them out. Talk about things that others are interested in.



MAPS MEDICAL PAIN CLINICS | DAVID M. SCHULTZ, M.D. | MEDICAL DIRECTOR  
2104 NORTHDAL BLVD. NW, SUITE 220 | MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55433  
(763) 537-6000 | (763) 537-6666 FAX | (800) 775-PAIN TOLL-FREE | WWW.PAINPHYSICIANS.COM

LIVING HEALTHY WITH CHRONIC PAIN



## RELATIONSHIPS

### pain and your loved ones



# THE PAIN STRAIN

## HOW CHRONIC PAIN CAN AFFECT YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND RELATIONSHIPS.

By Mary Esslinger, CNP

Chronic pain affects many aspects of a person's life. It can impact a person's ability to work, be productive and to function. In turn, it can affect them emotionally, physically, financially and socially. This can be very stressful. Our body and mind are one, and because of this, emotional stress directly affects our physical well-being and conversely physical stress directly affects our emotional well-being.

Sometimes people with chronic pain withdraw from family activities, friends and work. This can lead to isolation, deepening depression and increased financial problems. Others continue to be involved with friends and family and continue working. The pain is still there, but the other issues may not be as significantly affected.

Focusing on pain can increase depression and take ones focus off all of the other important things going on in life. Focusing on pain uses up energy and does not do anything to diminish the pain. In addition, it increases stress for family members. It can harm personal relationships and decrease self-esteem. It is far more productive to focus on abilities rather than disabilities. This will help the mindset that a normal life can be led despite the pain.

Some people react to pain by severely restricting activity. They feel this is the only way they can control the pain. This results in deconditioning and increased weakness and ultimately decreased ability to perform regular daily activities. When stamina is lost, the thought of becoming active again can be very daunting.

Chronic pain can also affect the spouse or significant other. It is very difficult when a loved one is in pain. In addition to the emotional toll, the spouse sometimes takes on a more parenting-type role and assumes more of the household chores and responsibilities in an effort to decrease the burden on the person in pain. This can eventually cause resentment on the part of the spouse and the pain sufferer. As time goes on, the spouse's patience may wear thin, causing frustration and anger. They may unintentionally direct their anger toward the pain sufferer. Then the spouse may feel guilty about being angry, which leads to increased attentiveness and caring for the chronic pain sufferer.

These emotions tend to cause the cycle to begin over and over. Furthermore, when a chronic pain sufferer becomes depressed, interpersonal relationships become strained because communication, togetherness, intimacy, and everyday life can be such a challenge. People who have caring family and friends, are usually better able to cope with chronic pain. They are less likely to experience depression and tend to be more independent. It is important for the pain sufferer and their spouse to be aware of how their actions are affecting the other. Open communication between the two can help to diffuse anger and resentment as well as fears.

Consider counseling for yourself and your spouse if you are suffering from chronic pain. Counseling can help the pain sufferer and significant other learn about pain and how it affects them. There are techniques for pain management and stress reduction that can be taught by mental health professionals. Families can learn how to support each other without acting in a way that encourages the pain sufferer to become less active and more dependent. When you learn how to manage your pain, you can focus on all the things you enjoy in life.



## OPIOIDS & CHRONIC PAIN

- Make an effort to learn more about chronic pain and how you can help, as well as how you should not help.
- Do not try to "take care of" your spouse by waiting on him/her and not allowing the pain sufferer to do things he or she is capable of. This encourages dependence and may result in lower self-esteem and increased depression.
- Avoid over-sympathizing with your spouse regarding pain. This can interfere with rehabilitation. Studies show that when family members are supportive in a healthy way that doesn't reinforce pain behaviors, such as limping, or groaning, the person with chronic pain has a much better prognosis. Remember, focusing on pain can increase depression and take the focus off all of the other important things in life.
- Join your spouse in activities. Offer to go along for a walk or to the appointment with the doctor.
- Living with a person who has chronic pain can be very stressful. Consider counseling for yourself and your spouse to help you discover ways to decrease stress and understand chronic pain.
- Encourage your partner to get psychological help from a professional so you can be the partner NOT the therapist.
- Remember you are a priority, even as a caregiver! Take care of yourself. Spend time doing things by yourself and for yourself. It will make you a better partner and a happier person. You can share that happiness.