

Mentally Coping with a Fibromyalgia Diagnosis

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Fibromyalgia. You may have never heard of it, but it is likely that there is someone in your circle who will get this syndrome. Fibromyalgia is a nerve based disorder that causes constant pain, consistent fatigue, hormone and gastrointestinal issues, depression, anxiety, dizziness, sleep, memory and cognitive difficulties.



About 10 million people are currently diagnosed with this disorder. Although 9 out of 10 people diagnosed are women, men also get this disorder. Scientists have been unable to find the cause and there is no cure. Current medications only treat symptoms, and they do so pretty ineffectively. Medications that reduce nerve activity seem to help, as well as drugs that target changes that the brain undergoes in response to pain and distress. Massage, acupuncture, and biofeedback have been shown to provide mild relief for short periods of time.

It's essential that a person with fibromyalgia make the mental transition from having a healthy and active life to looking healthy but living with debilitating symptoms. This transition allows the individual and their family to understand that life changes significantly and permanently.

- The first key to coping is realizing that life must be arranged around fibromyalgia. This disorder is made worse every time a part of one's nervous (sympathetic) system has to adjust to stress or environmental changes. When forced to respond to changes, the sympathetic system tends to overreact causing bodily systems to swing out of balance. Reducing the amount of change that this system must respond to often helps.
- The second key is to understand that the system that is most affected is the muscular system. The muscles think that they are being hurt because the nerves seem to be sending false information to the brain. The muscles cramp and spasm in response. Mild stretching and movement are the keys to minimizing these symptoms. Balance activity and rest.
- The third coping key is to recognize that fibromyalgia changes relationships. The pain and fatigue gets so intense that it becomes more than individuals can process. People tend to withdraw from a painful world as much as is mentally possible. This usually means that they withdraw from people as well. Reality hurts. They have to disconnect to mentally survive. This is not a rejection of family or friends. It is a temporary escape. When the symptoms subside, they are able to reconnect.

It is essential that family and friends understand the needs of someone with fibromyalgia. It is also essential that partners and children do not think that they have done something wrong. Relational stress increases dramatically, so knowledge and understanding helps families to cope with it all.

Therapy is often helpful. While there are multiple research studies looking for treatments and cures, the primary thing that helps fibromyalgia sufferers at the current time is to make the mental transition that allows them to make the life adjustments to moderate the symptoms as much as possible.

You can also join a support group. **Fibromites Unite** meets the at St. Margaret Mercy Hospital in Dyer. For more information visit www.fibromites.org. With support and help, an individual may not get well, but life can get better.



For more information, call
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219-226-1810



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