

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH PEOPLE IN CHRONIC PAIN

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1. Those of us with chronic pain may appear to be unreliable. When we are feeling better, we promise things (and mean it); but when in serious pain, we may not be able to follow through on what we so very much wish we could do. We find it difficult to count on ourselves at times, but it doesn't mean we wish it to be this way.
2. An action or situation may result in pain several hours later, or even the next day. Delayed pain is confusing to people who have never experienced it.
3. Pain can inhibit listening or distract from other communication skills. Imagine trying to talk over a fire alarm or have a productive conversation while people are shouting in the background. The effect of constant pain on the mind can mimic an attention deficit disorder because of the constant distraction the pain causes. So you may have to repeat a request or write things down for a person living in chronic pain. Please don't take it personally or think that we are stupid or careless.
4. The senses can easily become overloaded while living with pain. For example, noises or stressful arguments that wouldn't normally bother you can be overwhelming for someone in chronic pain.
5. Patience may seem short with those who live in pain. We can be misinterpreted as being rude and impolite at times. We find it difficult to keep sharply focused on what we are saying so it can be hard to tolerate long drawn-out conversation or fun debates. We do wish to participate and enjoy your company, but sometimes we may not be able to.
6. When we are asked, "How are you doing?" be genuinely prepared to listen to a horrific response because otherwise we must deny the truth to you about our daily lives. That question can mix up the emotional knots that we keep locked up inside as we learn to hide, tolerate, and live with our pain.
7. Pain can sometimes trigger physical or psychological disabilities. When in pain, a small task like doing the laundry can seem like a huge wall too high to climb at that time. But in an hour or so, the same job may be quite possible! It is sane to be depressed occasionally when you constantly hurt. We sometimes simply require more time to get it under control.
8. Pain can come on fairly quickly and unexpectedly. Pain sometimes abates after a short rest. When people with chronic pain are invited

to an event they appear to be fine and then gradually begin fading away as their pain intensifies. They may need to leave early, which appears unpredictable to others.

9. Knowing that there is a refuge, such as a couch, a bed, or a comfortable chair, is as important as knowing where the bathroom is to people living with chronic pain. A welcomed trip is much more enjoyable if there is indeed a refuge we can escape to if and when needed. It's understandable that a person in chronic pain may not wish to go somewhere that has no refuge.
10. Small acts of kindness can seem like huge acts of compassion to a person suffering from chronic pain. Your offer of a pillow, a cup of tea, or simply a gentle hug can really be the high point to a person who is feeling temporarily helpless, depressed, or withdrawn when pain comes knocking.
11. Not all pain is easy to locate or describe. Sometimes there is a body-wide feeling of discomfort, with hard-to-describe pains in the entire back, or in both legs, hands, feet, neck and/or shoulders. It's hard sometimes to pinpoint one particular spot. It's as if it had a will of its own! Our vocabulary for pain is very limited compared to the body's ability to feel varieties of discomfort.
12. We may not have a good "reason," or a genuine diagnosis, for the pain we endure. Medical science is still limited in its understanding of chronic pain and its many causes. There are many of us who live in pain who have not yet been classified by doctors as having an officially recognized "disease." That does not reduce the pain we must endure every day of our lives; it only reduces our ability to give it a label to make it easier for you to believe us.

Dennis is a support group member.