

Coping with Chronic Pain

If you're living with chronic pain, it's not just about swelling, achiness, throbbing or other physical symptoms. The challenge of day-in, day-out pain that lasts longer than 3 months can keep you awake at night and cause a lot of stress.

"We certainly know that depression and anxiety both make pain worse, and pain then also makes depression and anxiety worse. So, again that's kind of a vicious cycle that we work with patients to break."

"Being 35 and getting diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis was pretty scary. Because, you know, you hear of arthritis just in old people you know 60s, 70s my grandmother had it."

Sue Schneeberg is learning to cope with the arthritis that, some days, makes it hard to get out of bed.

"My 5-year-old has helped me take off my shirt to get ready for bed because I can't lift my arms because my shoulders are so sore. It's, it can be depressing but I try not to let it depress me because I know it could just, that would just be, it would just make it even worse."

Like many who suffer with chronic pain, Sue relies on family and friends to support her. But she also finds chatting online with other arthritis sufferers helps, too.

"I'm actually a member of a couple different Facebook groups that I found for rheumatoid arthritis, and we'll chat back and forth but even just reading what people are posting and just knowing that that support's out there helps a lot."

"It's real people, talking about what's going on in their lives."

Online support groups also help Cee Cee Ceman cope with the chronic muscle and bone pain of fibromyalgia.

"So, I can just like scroll through and just listen to people and see what's going on. And then you connect with someone, and you have the same kind of thing going on."

Some people find medications that treat depression or anxiety can also help them cope with the challenges of living with chronic pain.

"A lot of those same chemicals that are involved in depression in the brain are also involved in the pain pathways. And so that's why those medications work for both chronic pain and for depression and anxiety."

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If you are taking prescription opioids to manage your chronic pain, only take them as prescribed by your healthcare provider. If you are concerned you may be addicted to prescription opioids, talk to your healthcare provider. For more information, visit [hhs.gov/opioids](https://www.hhs.gov/opioids).

Still others find different ways to cope. John Zemler, who has a host of injuries with lingering pain, loses himself in his artwork.

"If I'm holding a pencil in a way that you would if you're writing that pain will persist and can actually shut down my arm. And so, I have really limited use of what I can do with that arm. But once in a while you can get lost in a drawing and you're not there."

John admits the chronic pain that, at times, makes it difficult to work to even leave the house had him think about suicide a few times. But his artwork is a good form of therapy.

"If I had chosen to harm myself, I would not have drawn that. And I would not have brought joy to someone else. And so, there are still some drawings out there in my future. I hope that elicit joy from somebody."

"Everybody's got a problem whether it's fibro or mental disease or a hiccup, you know. It's how you choose to live with it and deal with it. What's the alternative? So, I choose to wake up. And keep on keeping on, as best I can."

If you find yourself anxious or depressed about living in chronic pain, reach out and find the support you need. Your healthcare provider can recommend therapy, support groups or medications that can help.