Living a Full and Healthy Life With Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Coping With Rheumatoid Arthritis

Hearing those two words come from your doctor's mouth causes many feelings in you. As soon as you receive the rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis, you begin the coping with rheumatoid arthritis process.

Consider the parallel between a loved one's death and a medical diagnosis. Both are losses that trigger changing thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Both take time to process and resolve, with acceptance being the goal at the end of the road.

The acceptance you seek can only be had through positive coping skills. If your coping skills are overwhelmingly negative, you will have extended periods of denial, anger, depression and anxiety that continue on a steady rotation. Your mental health will decline with your physical health. You will never attain the acceptance, understanding and peace that you prize.

You want acceptance and peace, but you have to work for it. Positive coping following a chronic medical diagnosis does not happen magically. Instead, it requires an effort that is deliberate, organized and followed with consistency. So, you need a plan for coping with rheumatoid arthritis.

Minimize the Negatives

You can never reduce all the stress that is factoring into your life. With RA, you can never make symptoms disappear, but by following a few tips, you can diminish the symptoms and lower your stress.

Reduce the Weight

Every time you move, your muscles, bones and joints need to work. The more weight you have to move, the more work it is for your body. With RA, your joints will take the brunt of this work and feel worse.

Losing weight will improve your RA symptoms as well as many other aspects of your life. If you have not been serious about losing weight before, choose now as the time to start. Some medications can trigger weight gain with rheumatoid arthritis so maintaining weight can be an appropriate goal as well.

Don't Eat the Triggers

Speaking of weight loss, cutting out a few foods could greatly improve your RA symptoms. Reducing or eliminating gluten and aspartame from your diet may prove helpful.

Be sure to avoid a group of plants known as nightshades. These include potatoes, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes. People report that these foods will make their symptoms worse and flare RA pain.

Stop Smoking

You may think that smoking has little to do with RA, but the link is strong. Studies show that people who smoke are more likely to have RA and people who keep smoking with RA have a poorer response to treatment. Interestingly enough, tobacco is another type of nightshade plant discussed above.

Obviously, quitting smoking is easier said than done. Be realistic about the role that smoking plays in your life and find practical approaches to subtract this negative. Too often people complain that the patch, the gum, the pill and other treatments did not work for them.

Are setting yourself up for success or failure? Smoking is one of the hardest addictions to break and if you do not change your habits, your smoking will not change. Treat this aspect as a matter of life or death – because it is.

Improve Your Body

Focusing too much on subtracting the negatives may leave you confused about which direction to aim. Once you have eliminated the stresses on the previous page, begin improving your body to improve your coping with rheumatoid arthritis skills. Here’s how:

Consider Your Joints

You need your joints more than they need you. Be kind to them with increased awareness of how you are treating them.

Are you banging away on the keyboard or clicking the mouse for hours? Are you swinging open car doors or sitting in a chair you know is too old and uncomfortable? Treat your joints to a little understanding by seeking out ways to change old habits.

A different keyboard angle could make a world of difference. A new chair could improve comfort and reduce pain. Find tools designed for people with RA. They can make a range of tasks pain-free, which will encourage you to do those more often.

Improve Your Body

Stay Consistent

Keeping up with your RA treatment is necessary to give your body the best chance to do well. Attend all appointments with questions and feedback for your doctors. More information from you helps them understand your condition more fully.

In terms of medication, be as consistent as you can to ensure the best efficacy. If you take medication without reliability, it will be challenging to know if it is doing its job. Try taking the same medication at the same time daily to build routines for your body.

Mix Hot and Cold

Listen to what your body is telling you. If you can treat your daily pain before it becomes too overwhelming, you can get more done today and tomorrow. Sometimes you will need the coldest ice pack your freezer can create and other occasions only heat will do.

Experiment and seek feedback from the experts to know which is best for you at a given time. A hot bath or a cool shower may be ways to integrate the hot and cold into your daily routine.

Eat for Health

Focus on lean meats and vegetables while paying attention to what your body is telling you along the way.

If certain foods increase your symptoms, you want to be aware. Try to have fish twice a week for the Omega-3s. Increase the soy, olive oil, citrus, cherries and milk in your daily diet. Focus on foods full of vitamins and nutrients that reduce inflammation and improve bone health.

Exercise

Before you discount the idea of exercise because your body is not up for the task, consider the range of exercises available to you.

Stretches are simple enough for anyone to learn and people with RA can do these routinely. Running a marathon might be out of the question, but swimming is a great low impact aerobic exercise. Even weight training can strengthen the muscles surrounding the joints to decrease the pain.

Try different types. You have so much to gain.

Improve Your Mind

Chronic pain is highly related to mental health issues. As pain gets worse, so does depression and anxiety. As depression and anxiety increase, so does pain. Want to think and feel better? Here's how:

Change Your Thinking

Your thoughts have a profound impact on how you feel and how you experience pain. If you are pessimistically thinking that RA has ruined your life and you can never be happy again, you will not be.

Pay attention to the thoughts that feed into depression and spin them around. This is called reframing. In reframing, you take the depressing thought and find some way to turn it into a positive. If you are stumped, ask a trusted friend. Work to use the RA as motivation to work harder to maintain and improve your life.

Relax

If you experience more anxious symptoms than depression, relaxation is essential for improvement. Finding new ways to relax your mind will help you relax your body. When your body is tense, you will likely have more pain in your joints.

Research relaxations like autogenic training, guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation to get the calm mind and body you are looking for.

Therapy

If you tried the above tips and they worked well, you might be a good candidate for therapy. Therapists are helpful professions full of great tools for a variety of symptoms. They can take the above tips and expand them to other parts of your life or zero in with more precision to tackle a tricky thought.

Therapists can also tailor relaxation techniques to your specific needs. Search for a therapist with a holistic approach, meaning that she understands the connection between mind and body. A healthy mind in a healthy body is always the goal. Remember that coping with RA is a lot like the grief and mourning process. A therapist can help move you from shock to acceptance.

Conclusion

Don't let yourself fall into the hole of negative coping skills. They only cover up your problems in the short-term before creating new and different problems.

By using the positive coping with rheumatoid arthritis skills of reducing the negatives, improving your body and improving your mind, RA will not be the end. It will be the beginning of something great.