Managing Anger with Rheumatoid Arthritis

by ANNA SCANLON

Ways RA Causes Anger and How to Cope

Living with rheumatoid arthritis, especially if you were diagnosed as a younger person, can be extremely difficult. Many times those with the condition develop a lot of anger, which can lead to depression. Since stress plays a major role in the progression of symptoms and bringing on flares, this can ultimately make your symptoms worse.

Anger at Limitations

Anger simply for having RA is pretty common, especially when the condition means you're missing out on things you used to do.

For example, before I was diagnosed with lupus (which is not the same as RA, but if you look at lupus vs RA you'll find similarities) I loved to dance, sing and act. Because of the fatigue and pain lupus causes, I can no longer make the commitment needed to even do amateur theater anymore, taking away a huge part of my life and one of my favorite things to do.

Stories like mine are extremely common, as are the stories of missing out on family time, milestones with children, and even things like furthering education or being able to hold down a full-time job. Many people's social lives are negatively impacted, and they may feel increasingly depressed and isolated.

Anger at Family Members or Friends

This is especially tough, but a very real issue that many RA patients face. Family members and friends can be cruel or unsupportive, especially if they are confused about what RA is and how it affects you.

Family members and friends may go so far as to accuse you of exaggerating or faking your symptoms for attention or to get out of social or work obligations. However, this is more than likely not the case and can lead to lots of anger and resentment on both sides.

It's best to sit down and talk out your feelings with the person in question and try to get them to understand what it is you go through everyday. Bringing home pamphlets or books about your condition or suggesting websites to visit is a great way to promote understanding.

If they still have trouble and they are particularly close to you, speak to them about accompanying you to a doctor's visit to witness exactly what it is you're going through and encourage them to ask the doctor any questions they may have.

If they are still unable to offer you support, unfortunately it may be time to let them go. It can be a very difficult decision to make, but ultimately it is a great risk to your health to stress yourself out trying to please someone who just doesn't – or refuses to – get it.

Anger at Medical Professionals

This is a big one and pretty typical of people with chronic illnesses. Most of us, at some point or another, are seen and treated by a particularly unsympathetic doctor or nurse.

They might tell you that you don't have the disease you know you have, attempt to change your medication without really consulting your charts, or try to convince you that whatever new symptom you're experiencing is all in your head.

This is really difficult for many of us because doctors are supposed to be there to help. When you feel sick people encourage you to visit your doctor, but often the idea of making that trip fills you not with hope, but a sense of dread.

If you're able to, talk to other people with RA and find a doctor who has been particularly sensitive to their needs. Finding a doctor, however, is a bit like finding a good therapist. You're not going to gel well with everyone, but it is important to find the perfect fit. You need to gel with the team of professionals that treat you to ensure that you are getting the best quality care. This can really reduce your anger and stress.

Ways to Cope

Experiencing anger with rheumatoid arthritis is totally normal, but it's extremely important to learn to cope with that anger and not let it get the best of you.

Seeing a therapist on a regular basis is a great idea, but not something that is within everyone's reach. Instead, try and seek out an RA support group in your area where you can go and meet others with RA. This will not only make any feelings of isolation lessen, but it will allow you to vent your anger to people who actually know what you're going through.

Together, you can come up with ways to improve your lives and everyday functionality. Being angry alone can make things a lot worse, but joining a support group means that you are never alone and there is always someone to reach out to when things get too difficult.

If you live in an isolated area and attending a support group is not possible, there are many support groups online. A quick search of Facebook will already give you access to tons of groups chock-full of people ready to lean on one another through the toughest times in their RA journey.

Although seeing a therapist and joining a support group are some of the best ways to cope with your anger, there are other ways you can reduce it as well:

- **Find activities to participate in.** Participate in your favorite hobby, or find a new one if you're unable to do what you used to do. You may find that you have a talent for photography or crocheting. Focusing on something creative for a while always helps take your mind off of things.
- **Exercise.** Although it may be difficult with RA, it is especially beneficial for the mind and body. Take an anti-inflammatory about an hour before you begin and get your body moving. You'll feel better in no time, guaranteed.
- **Get out of the house.** Many people are housebound due to RA or depression coupled with RA. Try and get out if you can. This can be something as small as walking around the block, or taking yourself out to dinner and a movie. Getting out can most definitely reduce your sense of isolation and pain.