



Coping with chronic illness

Common issues

Many people, families and caregivers face some degree of depression, anxiety and fear when chronic illness becomes part of their lives. Chronic illness can evoke feelings of loss due to the loss of control over life events, body functioning, sense of self or what you thought your life was going to be like. Some illnesses are ongoing, while others come with flare-ups and periods of remission. Either of these can result in unknowns and uncertainties about both the illness and life moving forward. That is when it is important to see a licensed health care professional.

Assess

- Feelings – Do you feel sad, angry, overwhelmed, irritable, empty, hopeless, guilty or worthless?



Assess

- Physical – Are you constantly tired, experience headaches, cramps or gastrointestinal issues, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, weight loss/gain?
- Behavior – Has your behavior changed? For example, you have stopped doing things you used to enjoy, you avoid social settings and contact with family and/or friends, you rely on alcohol and medication, you have difficulty concentrating, eating too much or loss of appetite
- Thoughts – Do you think thoughts such as “I’m a failure”, “I’m worthless”, “Life’s not worth living” or “People would be better off without me”? Do you have trouble concentrating, remembering details and making decisions?



Self-care

- Continue treatment or talk to the doctor about different treatment options.
- Make time for regular exercise, such as daily walks.
- Get more sleep.
- Eat healthier.
- Engage in mindfulness meditation (deep breathing exercises, etc.).
- Lean on your social support network.
- Live in gratitude: begin by writing 2-3 things you are grateful for each day.
- Engage in activities you enjoy.
- Focus on things that are going well and try new activities / interests.



Reach out

- Contact the [Employee Assistance Program](#) for free, confidential counseling services.
- Join a local support group or online forum.
- Speak to your primary care physician or treating specialist and discuss your concerns and symptoms, including potential side effects of medication.
- Be open to treatment options which may include therapy and/or medication.



Need more information?

- Center for Chronic Illness:
www.thecenterforchronicillness.org/about-1.
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America:
<https://adaa.org>.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness:
www.nami.org.
- National Institute of Mental Health:
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/chronic-illness-mental-health/index.shtml.



Need more information?

- American Cancer Society – Living with Cancer:
www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/talking-about-cancer/listen-with-your-heart/living-with-cancer.html.
- When Should I Seek Help Tip Sheet.