

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Dealing With Pain and Depression When Recovering from an Illness

Increasing advances in medical science are resulting in cures for many serious illnesses that would previously have been fatal. As a result, more people are finding themselves in the recovery stage of illness, which often brings the accompanying challenges of pain and depression.

Many of us are not fully prepared for this somewhat negative aspect of recovery. We look forward to recovery as the end of a difficult journey, when in fact recovery is often a slow and gradual process that requires physical and emotional stamina. It's important to recognize that such challenges are normal and don't usually last forever.

Understanding the causes of pain and depression is the first step to finding solutions. There are many resources to help you with this—don't feel you have to struggle alone.

Communicating with Doctors

Your doctor will be a key player in seeing you through the recovery process. Be sure to maintain contact with him or her, and also consider the following suggestions:

- Be informed. Find out what pain is normal and to be expected. Ask how long it's likely to last.
- Ask how to tell when pain is abnormal and might indicate problems.
- Thoroughly discuss the pain medication you are prescribed and any side effects that could be expected.
- Keep a diary of your pain and share it with your doctor.
- Discuss whether alternative forms of pain management might be beneficial.
- Discuss whether depression is a side effect of your pain medication.
- Discuss whether antidepressants might be in order.
- Keep your doctor fully informed of any changes in the pain and depression you experience.

Pain Causes and Treatment

Pain broadly falls into two categories:

- **Acute pain.** This type of pain acts as a warning of possible damage to your body.

- **Chronic pain.** This type of pain may result from previous injury, including surgery, or conditions such as cancer, chronic infection, arthritis or nerve damage.

Different medications are prescribed for different types of pain. Your doctor will recommend the one that is best for you.

Pain management clinics are becoming increasingly common. These often take a holistic approach—a variety of treatments may be tried or combined to help you better manage your pain. These may include acupuncture, herbal medicine, hypnotherapy, aromatherapy, relaxation, diet and massage.

If pain suddenly becomes unexpectedly severe, seek immediate medical help.

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Suffering pain is in itself cause for depression. Loss of previous health, lifestyle and social network is a major contributing cause, resulting in its own form of grief.

Stresses over inability to work, future finances and the welfare of family caregivers can also be key factors. However, there are ways to cope. With the support of your doctor, consider the following methods:

- Group support programs can be of great help to both patients and caregivers.
- If your health allows, get dressed every day, resume hobbies and welcome social visits for short periods.
- With your doctor's permission, walk or exercise daily for short periods.
- Follow a balanced, nourishing diet.
- Take time for yourself—for both personal reflection and fun.

Although the recovery stage after an illness can be one that's accompanied by pain and/or depression, know that you don't have to go through it alone. Be sure to maintain communication with your doctor about your progress and any concerns that you may have. Also, don't be afraid to reach out to your family and friends for extra support throughout your recovery.