Some Days are Better than Others: Riding the Waves of Chronic Illness

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Your Dynamic Life

- Physical
- Psychological
- Social
- Spiritual
Overview and Objectives

★ What is stress?
  ○ Stress Responses
★ Active vs. Passive Coping
★ Coping and Stress Management Skills:
  ○ Social
  ○ Emotional
  ○ Physical
Semantics...

- **Acute adjective \(\text{ˈə-ˈkyūt}\)**
  - having a sudden onset, sharp rise, and short course <acute disease>
  - lasting a short time <acute experiments>
  - felt, perceived, or experienced intensely <acute distress>
  - demanding urgent attention <an acute emergency>

- **Chronic chronic adjective \(\text{ˈkrä-nik}\)**
  - marked by long duration or frequent recurrence: not acute <chronic indigestion> <chronic experiments>
  - suffering from a chronic disease <the special needs of chronic patients>
  - always present or encountered; especially: constantly vexing, weakening, or troubling <chronic petty warfare>
  - being such habitually <a chronic grumbler>
Living with the Uncertainty of Chronic Illness = Stress

- Stress is physical, mental, emotional tension that is a reaction to a perceived threat.
- When a person believes the demands exceed their personal or social resources to mobilize.
- Controllable vs. Uncontrollable
- Sense of Loss
Stress Responses

**Behavioural**
- Sleep disturbance
- Use of alcohol/drugs
- Absenteeism
- Aggression

**Emotional**
- Depression/anxiety
- Irritability
- Crying
- Suicide
- Loss of humour

**Cognitive**
- Lack of concentration
- Negative thoughts
- Worrying
- Poor Memory

**Physiological**
- Higher blood pressure
- Rapid shallow breathing
- Increased heart rate
- Dilation of pupils
- Muscle tension
- Dry mouth

**Biochemical**
- Increased metabolic rate
- Altered hormone levels (adrenaline, cortisol, ACTH)
- Altered endorphin levels

**Social**
- Withdraw, Reach out, Deny help, Fight, Irritable
Stress and Pain

Chronic Pain

- Worries about employment
- General health worries
- WorkCover worries
- Family and relationship worries (sexual concerns)
- Medication worries
- Financial worries
- Doctor’s and hospital visits (anger, frustration)
- Lack of enjoyment

Increased Pain

Sleeping Problems

Not Coping

Anxiety
Approaches to Coping

**Active coping:**
- Accept that the problem exists
- Take action to get rid of the problem
- Look for advice and information
- Adopt a new perspective: make the most of a bad situation
- Become aware of your feelings and express how you feel to others

**Passive/Avoidant:**
- Deny the problem exists
- Withdraw from social life
- Avoid the problem with alcohol or drugs
  - use of prescribed medications to help actively cope is different
- Blame & criticize yourself

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*The vicious cycle of anxiety*

- **Long term:** Increase in physical symptoms of anxiety, more worry, loss of confidence about coping, increased use of safety behaviours
- **Short term:** Relief
- **Escape or avoidance:** Increased scanning for danger, physical symptoms intensity, attention narrows and shifts to self
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **physiological needs**
  - breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep

- **safety and security**
  - health, employment, property, family and social stability

- **love and belonging**
  - friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection

- **self-esteem**
  - confidence, achievement, respect of others, the need to be a unique individual

- **self-actualization**
  - morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience purpose, meaning and inner potential

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Relationships Matter

Romantic - Partner - Marital

- *Walking on Eggshells* - Open and honest communication is key
- Relationships that function well don’t just happen – they require work and attention
- Social role changes happen and require communication
- Openly discuss expectations to help ensure that each person’s needs are being met
  - Let partners know what to expect of you, adjust and what *not* to expect
  - Choose and agree upon a good time to talk
  - Express your emotions – whatever they are
- Problems caused by pretending to be cheerful and denying more difficult emotions
- Intimacy is an essential part of satisfying quality of life
Relationships Matter

Friends - Community

• *Relationships change and evolve:* It is natural for some friends to understand; while others seem confused as to how to react, communicate and interact
• Stay close to those who support & inspire you
• Be clear in asking for what you need and want
• Maintain contacts
  – NOTE: Use of Social Media
• Diversify your portfolio of friends and acquaintances
Relationships Matter

Work

- Know your rights as an employee
- Consider creative ways for remote and part-time employment
- Seek out information from Human Resource and Employee Assistance Program professionals
- Consider the narrative and the way you want to be viewed at work
- Structure and planned activities can result in improved mood and increased sense of wellness
Physical Coping Strategies

- Breathing Exercises
  - 4-7-8 Breath
  - Square Breathing
- Physical Activity
  - Physical, Occupational therapy
- Exercise
- Adaptive and ergonomic changes
- Massage, Acupuncture, etc.
- Sleep hygiene practices
Emotional Health and Wellness

Coping with distressing emotions:

● Identifying and expressing emotion
● Gratitude practices
  ○ Gratitude Journal
  ○ Gratitude Jar
  ○ Gratitude Walk
  ○ Gratitude Meditation
    ■ Incorporate gratitude into prayer
  ○ Write Thank You Letter
  ○ “Count Your Blessings”
    ■ High-Low-High
● Artistic and Creative Expressions of Emotions
● Talk with a therapist
● Mindfulness practices - Mindfulness based stress reduction
  ○ HeadSpace, Buddhify, Calm, Insight Timer
  ○ https://youtu.be/nmFUDkj1Aq0
Emotional Health and Coping

Chronic stress can result in symptoms of anxiety and depression

If painful emotions:
- Last for 2 weeks or longer
- Significantly impact your sleep, nutrition, activity
- Cause you to think about harming yourself or others
- Are impacting your life and ability to do things that are important to you
- CONSIDER speaking with a mental health or medical provider about treatment options

Treatment Options:
- Individual, Couples, or Group Psychotherapy
- Relaxation and Stress Management Skills
- Communication Skills
- Complementary Therapies
- Medication
- Exercise and Nutrition
Resources and References

- *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness* – 2013 – Kabat-Zinn
- *We Are Not Alone: Learning to Live with a Chronic Illness* – 1986 – Pitzele
- Bloggers - [https://blog.feedspot.com/chronic_illness_blogs/](https://blog.feedspot.com/chronic_illness_blogs/)
Q&A
THANK YOU

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