

Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

Coping with Your Arthritis

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



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CAPA Canadian Arthritis
Patient Alliance
experience · perspective · voice



Objectives

By the end of the session, you will:

- Understand the emotions you may experience with your diagnosis of inflammatory arthritis
- Learn some ways to deal with these feelings
- Identify support and resources that are available to help you live with inflammatory arthritis

What are some emotions you may experience being diagnosed and living with inflammatory arthritis?

Emotions when first diagnosed

- Learning you have a chronic illness like arthritis can be overwhelming
- Strong emotional reactions are natural
- Sadness is a common emotion you may experience when diagnosed and living with inflammatory arthritis. It can be increased by feeling helpless, alone, or isolated
- You may also have mood swings, trouble sleeping and become more dependent on others
- These feelings are also increased by your body's release of inflammatory cells

Emotions when first diagnosed

- With time and support from friends, family, and your healthcare team, you can learn to deal with your diagnosis and feel more in control of your inflammatory arthritis

Understanding your arthritis

- Understanding your arthritis can help you deal with the changes that are occurring in your body, including your emotions
- This knowledge is important to gain a greater sense of control over your disease
- Being informed helps you be more actively involved in your treatment, understand your treatment plan, and monitor your disease

Arthritis and the cycle of grief

Arthritis and the cycle of grief

- When diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis many people may feel a sense of “loss” and go through a grieving process that includes many of the 5 stages below:
 1. Denial
 2. Anger
 3. Depression or Sadness
 4. Bargaining
 5. Acceptance
- You may not always experience these stages in this order
- You may revisit a stage after passing through it
- Not everyone will experience every reaction or in the same way

**What are some ways to help you deal
with these emotions?**

Fight the downward cycle

- Understanding the grief cycle is part of adjusting to life with a chronic condition
- Take time to understand and work through your feelings:
 - Learn practical ways to deal with your emotions so you can feel more in control
 - Get help if you are having difficulty coping
- Stay as positive as you can to minimize stress
 - Let go of limiting thoughts and feelings
 - Try to focus on the positive instead of dwelling on the negative

Fight the downward cycle

- Talk to someone; share your feelings with family and friends who want to help
- Get professional help when you need it
 - Consider counselling
 - Ask your family doctor about available services
- Consider a support group (e.g. contact The Arthritis Society for more information)



Respond actively to arthritis

- Educate yourself about how to manage inflammatory arthritis and gain a sense of control over it
 - Use trustworthy websites (e.g. non-profit, university or government sites)
 - Attend classes in your community
 - Take out books from the public library
- Participate in the programs offered by The Arthritis Society or other programs available in your community



Respond actively to arthritis

- Make a realistic plan of daily activities and do them
- Take control of your life by knowing your limitations and adapting your routine accordingly
- Strike a balance between work, rest and play
 - Prioritize and pace your activities
 - Rest as required to manage fatigue
- Keep a weekly log to track pain, fatigue, sleep and daily activities to monitor your success and progress



Respond actively to arthritis

- Exercise daily
- Eat healthy foods for energy and to stay strong
- Learn new ways to cope with daily stress
- Be good to yourself, do things that bring you joy and laughter (e.g., reading, music, funny movies, etc.)
 - Distractions can help reduce pain and improve mood



Key messages

- Strong emotions may be a normal reaction when being diagnosed and with inflammatory arthritis
- Acknowledge these emotions and learn to deal with them or seek appropriate support to help you
- Be proactive in seeking help to manage your arthritis
- Remember that you don't have to handle your arthritis alone

Resources

- Arthritis Consumer Experts www.jointhehealth.org
- The Arthritis Foundation www.arthritis.org
- The Arthritis Society www.arthritis.ca
- Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance www.arthritispatient.ca
- Canadian Psoriasis Network www.cpn-rcp.com
- Canadian Spondylitis Association www.spondylitis.ca
- Rheuminfo www.rheuminfo.com

Resources

- Consortium of Mental Health. *Positive Coping with Health Conditions, A Self-Care Workbook; Anti-depression Skills Workbook; and relaxation exercises: www.comh.ca/selfcare* (all free)
- Davis M, Robbins Eshelman E, McKay M. *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook*. Sixth edition. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Oakland, California, 2008.
- Lorig K, Fries J. *The Arthritis Helpbook: A Tested Self-management Program for Coping with Arthritis and Fibromyalgia*. Fifth edition. Perseus Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000.
- Lorig K et al, *Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions*. Second Ed. 2000. Bull Publishing Company, Boulder, Co.