Coping with Injury or Illness

At some point in life, almost everyone is going to have to cope with a chronic health condition, long-term ailment, or injury. After all, we are human and move around in complex bodies that require a lot of care and upkeep—not to mention the health impacts many people experience from COVID-19!

Illness and injury can bring about many stressful circumstances, including lack of mobility, giving up cherished activities, and spending time on difficult therapeutic tasks. In short, everyday life can become a little more difficult, which in the long term, takes a toll on mental health.

In studies of patients recently diagnosed with various types of chronic illnesses, a high percentage of individuals experienced symptoms of depression after diagnosis. Because depression often leads to poor eating habits, lack of exercise, and inconsistent sleep, it may actually complicate your recovery and worsen your overall physical condition.

Here are helpful strategies for coping with an illness or injury, so that your mental health improves along with your physical health:

- **Prepare yourself.** In some instances, we know ahead of time when a treatment regimen will start or when surgery will take place. This allows time to prepare for the physical and emotional changes that the recovery process will entail.
- **Maintain your routine.** A lot will change during an illness or injury, so it’s useful to try and keep as much of your daily routine as possible. This will provide you with a feeling of stability amidst the chaos and uncertainty of your illness/injury.
- **Stay informed.** The more you know about your condition, the better equipped you’ll be to understand what’s happening and why. Always direct your questions to medical professionals, and stay away from Googling too much.
- **Follow health maintenance instructions.** Managing illness or injury usually requires some action on our part. We need to follow through on physical therapy exercises, take medications as instructed, avoid certain activities, or use adaptive equipment. All this advice is given for a good reason and your health (physical and emotional) will benefit from following the instructions given by medical professionals.
- **Rally your team.** Lifestyle changes often require that others around you also make changes. That may mean adjusting to a new diet, having others take on more of the housework, or rearranging schedules to accommodate medical appointments. To make sure you have the support you need, consider sitting down with friends, family, or professional helpers to go over what you will need from them so everyone is on the same page and is supportive.
- **Stay connected.** Especially when dealing with illnesses or injuries that involve immobility or quarantine, people can start to feel very isolated, which will almost always lead to depression. It is important to connect with people in any way you can. Take this opportunity to attend events or join groups that don’t require physical activity, like a book club, for example.
- **Utilize coping skills for stress and depression.** Everyone goes through difficulties in life, and hopefully those experiences have taught us what coping strategies work best to get us through hard times. For some people journaling is helpful, for others, meditation, faith-based services, or leisurely drives can take the edge off. Try different things and use the coping strategies that work best for you.

If you are struggling with a long-term illness or injury and would like support, please contact Family Services EAP at 978-327-6666 email info@FamilyServicesEAP.org, or visit FamilyServicesEAP.org.