

It is really all About Focus:

Common thoughts and emotions that an individual may experience when coping with a new injury, illness or disease.

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Ref: “Acquired Hope: A Journey of Advanced Recovery and Empowerment” book and www.acquiredhope.com

Changing Focus

Approximately 290 million people in the U.S. are coping with a chronic medical condition that results in impairments, disabilities or alters their way of living. Often times this level of disability is a result of three things; the medical condition itself, the environment or support systems and thirdly, the individual’s focus. We, as individuals coping with medical conditions have an opportunity to improve our level of function and abilities. That should be our focus, as this is something we can control.

In success of any kind, it is really all about focus. Often times, when an individual is coping with a disabling injury, disease or chronic illness, they are focused on the negative impact, the losses and the new disability or lack of ability to do things that they were once able to do. We can learn to focus on our abilities or “difabilities”, as opposed to our disabilities. This change of focus can bring about higher levels of function, advance recovery and provide us with tools to help us achieve things we did not think we could achieve.

Common Negative Thoughts

One of the most critical steps in recovery of a chronic illness or injury is changing the chronic ways of thought. It is these chronic, negative thoughts that often are what keeps people ill. When one is preoccupied with health, when it is all one talks about and focuses on, it remains. If one explores the most common thoughts and emotions an individual has when coping with a chronic illness, injury or disease, one will see that the majority of these emotions are negative emotions. Negative emotions do not make us feel good. These negative emotions can be detrimental to a patient's recovery if they remained focused on them. Some of the negative emotions that one can experience when coping with the loss of health or function are described below.

Powerlessness

Chronic illnesses and accidentally injuries can often times appear uncontrollable and unpredictable. People may feel as if they have lost control over their bodies and their future. Loss of control feels like powerlessness. When people feel powerlessness, they may also feel hopeless, anger or rage, or even have feelings of despair, worthlessness, panic and fear. The less powerful an individual feels, the harder they may try to maintain control over their world.

However, if they learn to change the feelings of powerlessness and replace them with positive thoughts, such as passion, optimism, hope and enthusiasm. They can see that they are indeed capable of many wondrous things, and that they have control and power over many aspects of their health and body.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear plays a big part in the emotional pain of chronic illness, injury or disease. A patient may become afraid of many things, including the progression of a disease, the increasing loss of control or increasing disability, the outcome, the relapses or re-injuries. A patient may be afraid of how family members, neighbors, friends and co-workers feel about them, now that they have an injury or illness. They may have financial fears, fear of losing the ability to work or not sustaining a current income or position. They may fear not being able to support their loved ones. Fear can sneak up on them and fear can overwhelm them on a continual basis.

An individual may also experience anxiety. Anxiety is an emotion that arises as one anticipates fear or thinks that bad things are coming in their direction. Anxiety can be a disabling emotion and can leave one functionless. The fear and the anxiety of a chronic illness or condition can alone leave one chronically disabled. It is important to learn how to replace these feelings of fear and anxiety with good emotions and focus on abilities and good health.

Self-Pity

The chronically ill, physically challenged and those coping with other conditions often regret their condition and situation. This is a natural reaction. However, if this reaction becomes a chronic way of thinking, this individual will always be chronically ill. For many individuals enduring these circumstances, who feel self-pity don't see any way out of their situation. The path of self-pity leads only to isolation. It is important to change the focus from self-pity to a focus on ability and health.

Isolation

The feeling of isolation is another strong, negative emotion that can become overwhelming and self-destructive. Whether an individual is dealing with a disabling injury such as a spinal cord injury and paralysis or a chronic illness like diabetes or multiple sclerosis, that individual may often times feel alone or outside the norm, that nobody understands what they are going through. That individual may feel that they have been rejected and are not wanted or unloved. That they are different, and that this difference is a bad thing. They may become self-conscious, suffer from poor self-esteem or feel ashamed of their condition. All of these negative emotions and thought patterns only add to the isolation and a vicious cycle is created.

It is important for the patient to change this negative thought pattern by getting involved with others to feel the support from others, join support groups so that they understand that they are not alone and change their thinking by focusing on the positive aspects of their condition.

The chronic injury or illness experience can be a good thing. In David Letterman fashion, I have created my own top ten list of the positives of the chronic injury or illness experience:

- 10) Your pharmacist knows you by name.
- 9) Otherwise complete strangers are your instant friends, as they now share a common bond of the injury or illness experience.
- 8) You find an inner strength and sense of empowerment that you never knew existed.
- 7) You grow closer to those who love and support you.
- 6) You find out who your true friends are.

- 5) You have an opportunity to re-invent your self.
- 4) You explore and create new work skills and talents, that otherwise may have been left undiscovered.
- 3) You simplify your life.
- 2) You slow down and start to focus on the things that are really important to you.
- 1) You have an opportunity to explore and expand your current balance of the mind, body and spirit. You can become more resilient.

Anger and Rage

Individuals with a disease or condition may experience anger and rage. There may be anger against their bodies for “failing” them. There may be a sense of betrayal. There may be anger at the meaningless of their disease, injury or condition. Or they may blame themselves or others for their condition and current situation. They may express anger or rage at nature, life, the medicine they take and their side effects, the doctors/therapists for not curing them and their friends and family members for not understanding them or responding to them the way they would like at that exact moment. There may be anger when people make allowances for them and then when they do not.

It is important to understand that anger and rage are very powerful negative emotions. If a patient does not harness these emotions, the negativity may turn into self-destruction. However, if the patient can learn to harness and control it and turn it into positive energy, such as determination, passion, optimism and hope, the rewards can be staggering. It is really all about a change of focus.

Jealousy

Envy, resentment and jealousy are emotional reactions that are hard to separate from one another and are difficult to eliminate from our thought patterns. To be envious, is to wish you had something that someone else had. To be resentful, is to be angry and bitter because you do not have something that someone else has. For those with a chronic illness, injury or disease the thing that they want and do not think that they have, is health and full function. Because our culture is competitive in nature and there is such an emphasis on perfection and images that reflect the “perfect” person in magazines and in movies, when a patient is coping with an illness or condition, these feelings and emotions can be a monumental influence on their lives. A patient will need to learn to stop comparing themselves to what others have and what they look like and take themselves out of the competitive plane and focus on the abilities and strengths that they do have.

Grief

When coping with the onset of a chronic illness, injury or disease, grief can be one of the stages a patient may go through as they progress towards acceptance. There are typically three phases of grief:

1) Denial

2) Emotional pain

3) Acceptance.

Change can involve loss. Grieving involves focusing and feeling sad for our losses. Grief becomes a debilitating emotion when one cannot get through all the phases to the acceptance phase, but rather adopts a chronically negative way of thinking instead.

There is a blessing in the grieving process. As one goes through the three phases, one feels pain and agony and then finally the peace of acceptance. To go through the entire process, gives us a deeply rooted faith that all bad things do pass, that there is some way to deal with everything, no matter how hard or how bad it is, and that we will come out in the light. We are left ready and fully prepared to start over and rebuild.

Summary

A change of focus is required in order to maximize recovery and functional restoration. A change of focus from negative emotions, to more positive emotions such as; passion, optimism, hope, gratitude and acceptance are the keys to acquiring hope and living fuller. These are the positive emotions a person must take to heart in order to advance their recovery and fully restore function. Changing focus can be easy, once you learn the process of acquiring hope. To learn how to change your focus and attract good health, please read “*Acquired Hope: A Journey of Advanced Recovery and Empowerment*”.

Ref: “Acquired Hope: A Journey of Advanced Recovery and Empowerment” book and www.acquiredhope.com

Websites on coaching, working and living with chronic illness: www.cicoach.com and www.keepworkinggirlfriend.com