



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

Coping with Long Term Physical Health Conditions

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The Impact on life of a long term physical health condition

Having a long term physical health condition can have a huge impact on your life. Many people with physical health problems talk about how their life has been turned upside down since they developed the condition, that they don't feel like themselves, or feel that their personality has changed beyond recognition. These feelings are normal when diagnosed with a long term condition.

There are many ways in which long term physical health conditions can impact upon your life and you can end up in a vicious cycle of physical and psychological difficulties which worsen over time.

Losing Fitness over Time

People with long term health conditions often experience a deterioration in their physical abilities. Over time people can feel less fit, balance and coordination can be affected, and strength and stamina can reduce. People often describe being able to do less and less over time. Others may also notice changes in their ability to think clearly, make decisions and remember things.

Confusion

As a result of any physical deterioration, people with long term conditions can feel like they have lots of contact with health care professionals as they try to understand what is happening and gain some kind of control. It may be difficult sometimes to provide a clear diagnosis for the symptoms being experienced. People can often find themselves meeting with many different medical professionals in an effort to understand what is going on without much success. Sometimes it can feel like you are being given mixed messages about what will help and what you can do. Often people with long term conditions describe feeling “not listened to” or “not believed” by medical professionals they meet. Read on to section 2 and the related links to help you find ways to cope with confusion and uncertainty.

Wellbeing and Social Impact

As physical abilities deteriorate it can be difficult to continue to work anymore, and people can start to lose contact with friends and reduce their social activities. The people around the person with a long term condition can also be affected as roles and relationships change. Financial difficulties can mean that people

with long term conditions may also get caught up in the benefits system, which can lead to additional stress and uncertainty.

People with long term health conditions often describe feelings of anxiety, depression, frustration and anger in response to the impact the condition is having on their life. There can also sometimes be a feeling of having lost a sense of identity and role in life, a disconnection with who they are and a loss of confidence in what the body can do. Some people describe low self esteem and a lack of confidence in social situation.

What is self management of long term physical health conditions?

Many people who experience a long term health condition, describe a constant battle against the condition they have to try to maintain a normal life. The aim of self management is to stop trying to get rid of the illness, as this often leaves people feeling frustrated and stuck. The alternative is to find ways of coping with the impact of the illness and to look to the future, rather than dwell on the past. By doing this, the hope is to improve the quality of life, despite having a long term condition.

We hope that the 'Physical Health Problems' section of the moodcafé website will provide you with strategies and

information to help cope with physical ill health.

Visitmoodcafe.co.uk

for more helpful resources

