

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE PAIN ALONE!



Chronic pain is a heavy burden

Chronic pain is a heavy burden that affects many aspects of a person's life. It is not uncommon for chronic pain to make it more difficult to do ordinary things such as work, household tasks, sports and leisure activities. Such changes are usually very difficult for people with chronic pain to accept. They sense a growing distance between who they are now and who they used to be and what they used to do, and it seems like life is turning out very differently than they had planned. These feelings are often accompanied by anger, frustration, shame or guilt, and even the impression that they are not as valuable as they once were. This state of affairs leads many people to isolate themselves gradually from others, particularly if they think that others can't understand how they are suffering, or if they believe that they no longer have anything interesting to offer them.

When isolation sets in

People living with chronic pain who believe they have changed physically or psychologically – sometimes becoming unrecognizable even to themselves – can lose interest in spending time with others, visiting friends and family, and participating in social activities. This social withdrawal can be due to a lack of energy, fear of being a burden to others, or the fact that they are no longer able to do things as they would like to. For their part, friends and relatives often feel powerless in the face of a loved one's pain, and they may also gradually pull back. People suffering from chronic pain who isolate themselves may think it's better like that, but they soon begin to experience the negative effects of being alone, such as boredom, depression and anxiety. It is widely accepted that human beings need social interaction to maintain good health. In fact, positive social contact can help a person manage chronic pain and improve their quality of life.



Breaking the vicious circle

Isolation can be tempting and seen as less complicated, but it is a double-edged sword: it can cause a deterioration in the condition of people suffering from chronic pain, which leads to further isolation and results in more negative consequences. It is so important to break this vicious circle! Participating in an enjoyable social activity distracts people from their pain, which can make the pain less intense and more tolerable, not to mention the fact that good company is a great morale booster! For example, sharing a good meal and interesting conversation with one or several friends can be stimulating and make the pain feel less intense or even less noticeable during your time with them. Volunteering or joining an association can also strengthen your sense of self-worth, which is so essential. In other words, maintaining relationships and participating in regular social activities is an important strategy for anyone living with chronic pain. Easier said than done? Absolutely. But the effort is well worth it. It can be challenging to do things you like differently, more slowly or for a shorter period of time than you once did, but with practice and the support of people who care about you, it is definitely possible.

You are not alone

For many people, connecting with others who are going through similar experiences can be a good way to develop solid relationships. It can help to contact organizations like the

“Association québécoise de douleur chronique” (AQDC) whose mission is to improve the condition and reduce the isolation of people suffering from chronic pain in Québec. You might be surprised to learn that many people are suffering in silence, just like you. Knowing that you are not alone in living with chronic pain is often the first step in breaking the isolation.

However, if you feel you are too depressed or anxious to meet with people, don't hesitate to speak to a health professional such as your physician or a psychologist.

It's not easy to deal with chronic pain. But doing it alone is even harder!

Here are a few tips for maintaining your social life despite your pain:

- Take a course on something that interests you greatly;
- Do group exercise adapted for your physical condition (e.g., adapted yoga);
- Take walks in your neighbourhood and meet your neighbours;
- Volunteer or work several hours a week;
- Connect with people through online social networks;
- Use the services available in your community (library, community kitchen, etc.);
- Accept invitations, keeping your capabilities as well as your limitations in mind.