

Introduction:

Health is physical and mental wellbeing, and a good life is one that finds the soundness. How can people live a healthy life while having an illness? To answer this question, we need to look at what happens with most long-term health problems. Most people who have health problems experience a series of symptoms and consequent problems including fatigue, pain, loss of physical strength and endurance. They may experience emotional distress such as frustration, anger, grief, anxiety or a sense of helplessness. A healthy way to live with a long-term condition is to work at overcoming the physical, mental and emotional problems caused by the disease. The challenge is to learn how to function at your best regardless of the difficulties of the health condition.

Long-term health issues typically start slowly, and progress slowly. For example, a person may develop diabetes and then might have other health issues that affects other organs of the body, same is the case with degenerative disorders, cardiac conditions, arthritis and like. Unlike acute conditions, these long-term conditions have multiple causes including heredity, lifestyle and

exposure to environmental factors such as pollution. Most people think that the symptoms they encounter are caused by the disease itself. Nevertheless, each of these symptoms can contribute to other symptoms. In other words, the symptoms can feed on each other. For example, arthritis causes pain, pain causes physical limitations, poor sleep and more fatigue, forming a vicious cycle. The interaction of these symptoms makes the condition worse.

People react differently to similar health conditions. One may attempt to mitigate symptom impact, while the other may be severely disabled. One may focus on healthy living, while the other persons focus may be completely on the disease or disability. There is no 'one size fits all' model to help manage the health problems. How effective and engaged the person in self-management strategies that suit the person is of paramount importance in managing long term conditions. Like any skill, active self-management must be learned and practiced. Following are some of the techniques for self-management to better deal with long-term illness.

Using mind to manage symptoms:

There is a strong link between thoughts, attitudes, emotions and our mental health and physical health. Although thoughts and emotions do not directly cause our chronic condition, they can influence symptoms. Persons with long-term disabilities need to improve intellectual skills through preparation and practice to better control symptoms. They need to learn to use their minds to calm the body, reduce anxiety and tension, and reduce physical and emotional symptoms of pain or unpleasantness.

Relaxation exercise including body scanning and visualization were found to be successful in addressing emotional problems. The goal of relaxation is to be calming the mind and body. For example, walking, watching TV, listening to music, knitting, gardening, playing with children or pets etc. Body scan helps to spot and release tension anywhere in the body. The way we talk to ourselves tends to come from how and what we think about ourselves. Our thoughts can be positive or negative and so is our self-talk. Therefore, positive self-talk is an important self-management tool. There is strong evidence of the relationship between spirituality and health. Spirituality is the way we can find

meaning, hope, comfort and inner peace in our lives.

Mindfulness is another technique which involves simply keeping attention in the present moment. Without judging it as happy or sad, good or bad, it encourages living each moment-even painful ones-as fully as mindfully as possible. It is a way of calmly observing and accepting whatever is happening in the present moment. Numerous studies across the globe have reported the impact of mindfulness techniques in reducing pain in clinical and experimental settings (Kabat,1982; Kabat et al, 1985; Grant and Rainville, 2008; Brown and Jones, 2010; Zeidan et al, 2009; Gard et al, 2011; Garland, et all; MacCoon et al, 2011; Lutz et al, 2012). In their study, Zeidan, et al have reported that mindfulness meditation engages specific pain-relieving mechanisms in the brain, different from placebo induced analgesia, and is hence a unique and effective technique for pain relief. (Zeidan et al, 2015). Once trained, a person with a chronic health condition can integrate this technique into his/ her daily routine. One of the most effective ways to improve mood and overall happiness is by focusing individual's attention on what's going well in the life. Studies have showed that people can enhance

their happiness level by practicing gratitude (Emmons and Mc Cullough, 2003; Seligman *et al*, 2005)

Physical Activity:

Regular exercise can prevent or control numerous health conditions. Physical activity improve blood pressure and levels of blood fat, helps maintain a healthy weight and keeps the bones strong. Exercise improves levels of strength, energy and self-confidence and lessens feelings of stress, energy, anxiety and depression. It also helps sleep better and feel more relaxed and happier. A population-based twenty years long study conducted in Copenhagen by Garcia Aymerich J, Lange P and Benet from 1981 to 2000 has evidenced that patients suffering from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease have less number of hospital admissions and mortality when they engage in some form of regular physical activity. (Garcia-Aymerich *et al*, 2006). People often come up with a lot of excuses, concerns and worries though. The best way to enjoy the exercise program and stick with it is to choose an activity of interest that suits the person well. People who are not active be supposed to make a new habit or routine in their life. This usually involves setting aside a period of time on most days of the week to make exercise a part of their day.

A complete program combines exercises to improve flexibility, endurance, strength and balance. People may seek a physiotherapist's counseling or support to overcome barriers, excuses, concerns and worries about the exercise program.

Medications:

Most people with long-term conditions take one or more medicines, and so it is particularly important to understand the proper use of medicines. There is a great risk of unpleasant side effects. There have been cases of 'Medication Error' especially among the chronically ill, which usually occurs when medicines are taken by the patients without consulting a doctor or else ordered by the doctor but taken in incorrect doses at inappropriate times or in the absence of total lack of understanding of its purpose (Schwartz *et al*, 2018). It is particularly important to ask the treating doctor questions about the need to take the medication, its side effects, what foods, drinks or activities you should avoid while taking the medication. A cross-sectional study of patients above 60 years, gathered information relating to the medicine's name, regimen, purpose, side-effects and precautions. Around 52% of patients related that they were clearly educated about the correct usage of

prescribed medication by the hospital staff, 47% were clear about their drug's purpose but 11.4% had no clear idea about the side-effects. The study thus concluded that patients who take medications generally lacked knowledge on the side-effects of medicines which could affect badly the medication compliance. Poor knowledge about medication often leads to increased physical visits, unnecessary lab tests, treatments and hospital admissions etc. A study on patients with congestive heart failure found that, well informed patients had shown reduced number of cardiovascular related emergency visits. (Chan et al, 2013). Pharmacists are an important resource to clarify patients' doubts in relation to medication. In order to remember the intake of medicines it is advisable to put a reminder note or use electronic reminder, use checklist or ask other members of the household to remind.

Healthy Eating:

Eating healthy means making good and healthy food choices. We get loads of information about what we should and shouldn't eat in the present social scenario. Healthy eating prevents health conditions from posing further problems. Special attention should be given to put together

meals that are tasty and enjoyable yet healthful. Foods that are least processed or refined are important to get enough fibers for the body. Eating at regular times during the day, eating wide variety of food, eating slowly, reducing the portion size etc are important. There is no such thing as a perfect food or a bad food.

Another problem most people face is emotional eating. The emotional reasons are mostly related to the feelings of frustration and boredom. Mindful eating is an effective strategy to deal with such issues. Eating small portions slowly and fully involved in the eating process help us enjoying our food with more satisfaction and contentment. As people age, healthy eating plays a critical role in their rehabilitation and quality of life. An individualized nutritional approach helps in achieving optimal health for the aging population (Hultin, 2018).

A vegetable diet is highly recommended for the prevention and treatment of diabetes, heart disease and various other chronic conditions. In a study, it was estimated that in Canada, more than 30,000 deaths could be averted if their main diets were revamped by including more portions of fruits and vegetables. Such studies underscore the importance and need of public policies to

support healthy dietary choices(Kaczorowski et al, 2016)

Healthy weight management:

Body weight affects our health, appearance, mobility and emotions. Being underweight and overweight can seriously increase our likelihood of developing health problems. While having a long-term condition healthy weight help us manage symptoms such as breathlessness, pain, fatigue, sleeplessness etc. It's very important to pay special attention to what you eat and how much physical activity you do. The simple and practical way to start with is making small changes in what you eat and in the amount of physical activity that we do. It brings in an energy balance and weight control. Initial focus should be on staying the same weight and not gaining any more weight and then think about reducing weight. The Global Action Plan on physical activity 2018 to 2030 has identified the importance to update the 2010 policy on physical activity as an essential part of the policy framework. (WHO, 2019)

Increasing physical activity has huge positive effects on patients with chronic illness. For example, a systematic review of the effect of physical activities on the cancer survivors has

reported improvements related to fatigue, quality of life (functional aspects), anxiety and self-esteem aspects. Another study, a Cochrane review twenty-three randomized controlled studies has shown a reduction or dip in the depression level of the participants. It is to be underpinned that, diet as well as physical activity has to go together in the most appropriate way during the intervention for the control and prevention of chronic illnesses. (The National Academies Press)

Decision making:

People with long-term conditions have always been forced to make their own decisions regarding their treatment methods. In the current technological era, there is a huge propagation of health information through internet. People should be able to properly evaluate these claims and recommendations in order to select the appropriate type of interventions. There is a crucial need to evaluate the source of that information in order to make sure that they are reliable sources like universities and research institution. The most reliable source of information is one's own doctor or health care team. Noting down all the questions patients want to ask the doctor when they see him/her next time will be helpful for them to plan ahead and remember everything. This

will make the consultation more productive and effective.

It has been recognized that effective self-care decision making has a positive effect on health. In one of the studies involving diabetes type I, type II and HIV patients, the patients were selected on the basis of an inclusion criteria that only those chronically ill participants will be considered who have several experiences in self-care decision making. It was learnt that all the participants were mostly committed to controlling their illnesses rather being controlled by it. They accepted the very fact that their disease was chronic and is now going to be a part of their life till the end. Their disease outcomes are directly proportional to their decisions with respect to self-care and secondary prevention and management. There has been much focus on the issues such as compliance with prescribed medication, modification of life style choices and decision making with respect to treatment options, symptoms control and self-care management. Family is often the most significant unit involved in this decision making, keeping paramount the needs and preferences of the patient (Powell *et al*,2016). Similarly, decision-making is key to self-management. Self-management intervention which is a person-centered

approach, attempts to empower the individuals to own up their life condition and be genuinely responsible towards self-care such as medication adherence, diet, weight management and maintain healthy behaviors etc. (Portz, 2017)

Breathing exercise:

Minding our breath is an important strategy for managing health conditions in the long term. In a study conducted by the Department of Endocrinology and Metabolism, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, it has been demonstrated that a comprehensive yogic breathing programme led to a significant improvement in the Quality of Life in patients with Type 2 diabetes. (Jyotsna *et al*, 2012). Deep respiration or attentive breathing has become an important exercise for the recovery of long-term health conditions. It is useful to settle body and mind and induce heightened sense of awareness. Better breathing energizes body and mind. With the right breathing techniques, one can actually reduce the extent of your anxiety and anxiety symptoms. A simple breathing exercise is as follows: take a deep, slow breath in through your nose lasting close to 5 or 6 seconds. Then hold for a few seconds, and breathe out slowly through mouth, taking close to 7 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Sound sleep:

Sleep is a time during which the body is able to focus on healing. If we don't get enough sleep, we experience a variety of other symptoms such as tiredness, concentration inability, irritability, increased pain, and weight gain. Insomnia and sleep disturbances are commonly associated with chronic illnesses. A study among 3445 patients in Indianapolis reports a significant correlation between insomnia and decrease in health-related quality of life (HRQOL). A good sleep could be achieved by consider following ways: Going to bed at the same time every night, Getting up the same time every day, avoiding caffeine (including chocolate) and alcohol before bed time, avoiding screen time (TV, mobile phone, computers) right before going to bed, getting a comfortable bed and accessories, etc. In case of recurring insomnia, expert help should be taken (Katz,2002)

Action planning:

It's going to be stressful to think about the changes we need to make in our lives to better cope with the health. Most people feel that the steps to be taken to deal with these issues are too big, making it difficult to get started. Goal setting and making specific action plans is necessary to make the goals and objectives

achievable. It is very practical to make an action plan with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) objectives. This will help the patient to evaluate and keep track of their plan and its implementation. For example, when we make plan for doing more exercise, instead of stating your objective as 'I will do more exercise this week', state an objective which clearly states the particular physical activity, days, time, duration to do the activity. It is essential to periodically assess the outcomes of those decisions and to identify the barriers, if any.

Realistic objectives and an action plan are a must in order to manage chronic illness. Targeting becomes very important because patients and care providers often initiate several changes all at once, resulting in more confusions and complications which may lead to poor adherence and discouragement. Targeting should be done that gives more importance to the particular problem, patient motivation and self-care readiness. Later a behavioural goal and an action plan to achieve the target have to be established, which will enable the care providers and patients to monitor the progress (Korff et al, 1997). Taken together, adopting strategies appropriately at right time could help us live

a longer life even with the long-term ailments.

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