Coping with Chronic Illness and Therapies

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OVERVIEW

• Common psychosocial issues related to chronic illness
• Coping strategies for chronic illness
• When to seek outside help for coping with a chronic illness
WHAT ARE COMMON RESPONSES AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHRONIC ILLNESS?
ADJUSTING TO CHRONIC ILLNESS

• Some changes in mood are normal
• Changes in lifestyle and roles are typical
  • Economic changes
  • Social changes
  • Quality of life
FACTORS THAT AFFECT ADJUSTMENT

- Course of illness
- Treatment complexity
- Impact of illness on functioning
- Perceptions of control regarding illness
- Social support
- Coping style
HPEN SPECIFIC ISSUES

- Poor sleep
- Fatigue
- Difficulty traveling and socializing
- Changes in the meaning of food and eating
  - Eating for survival
  - Eating for health
  - Socializing around food
- Increased risk of substance abuse
- Body image
- Sexuality
STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS
COPING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

• Your coping mechanisms depend on what’s important to you
  – There is no one size fits all coping strategy

• Almost any coping strategy can be helpful
  – It depends on how you use it
  – Exception: coping strategies that involve self-harm or high use of avoidant coping strategies
FIGURING OUT YOUR COPING

• Start with identifying what you enjoy doing now or in the past
  – You may need to change how you do them
  – Look for themes

• Social support
  – Communicate your needs to others
  – Social media
RESEARCH ON COPING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

• Focus on strengths
• Active coping styles are associated with better adjustment
• Finding meaning in the situation
WHY IS COPING IMPORTANT?

• How we cope does not affect the illness
• But it does help to live a meaningful life within the limitations of the illness
• It can also help us to better manage our illness
ADJUSTING TO CHRONIC ILLNESS

• Adjusting to a chronic illness is not an epiphany, it is a process
  – Acceptance ebbs and flows, which is normal
  – Acceptance is not passive, it is active
WHEN IS IT TIME TO SEEK HELP?
WHEN TO SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY

• If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else
  – If you are unsure if you can keep yourself or others you care for safe.

• Go immediately to the closest emergency department
WHEN TO CONSIDER PSYCHOTHERAPY

• When your mood is not improving and is starting to affect your functioning
  – The sooner you seek treatment, the sooner you are likely to start feeling better

• When you are consistently feeling overwhelmed
  – Sometimes feeling overwhelmed is normal

• When your usual coping mechanisms aren’t helping
  – Or they are starting to interfere in your life
HOW TO SEEK THERAPY

• Contact your insurance company for a list of in network providers
• Contact your health care providers to see if they have psychology services available or referrals
• Contact patient organizations or others with the illness for recommendations
SUMMARY

• Some temporary changes in mood are normal with chronic illness
  – Chronic illness impacts your life in many different ways

• Your perceptions are important and impact your coping

• Coping strategies are individual

• Help is available if you need it
• QUESTIONS?

• THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION!