Navigating the Impact of CRPS on Caregivers

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Leanne Cianfrini, PhD
Basics to Remember About Persistent Pain

- Persistent pain vs. Acute pain
- Chemicals such as hormones and neurotransmitters can amplify the pain message
- The central and peripheral nervous system can get sensitized
- Persistent pain by definition also impacts emotional suffering
The good news is that the brain and nervous system can be re-trained to normalize ("Neuroplasticity").

We need a large toolbox – no one treatment gets us complete relief.

Zero pain might not be realistic - don’t chase that mirage with medications and invasive treatments.

Emphasize function as an outcome rather than focusing only on pain reduction.

“Self-Management” is the key for long-term control and quality of life.

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**Basics to Remember About Persistent Pain**

- Meditation
- Hugs / Pets
- Engaging in a creative hobby
- Exercise
- Sunshine / Nature
- Create new memories
- Achieving small goals
- Laughter
The Challenges of Caregiving

- **Survival instinct** – triggered when we or our loves ones are in danger
- Opportunity to develop **resilience**
- **Empathy**
  - Cognitive & Emotional
  - Not natural to everyone
  - The “empathy trap”
- **Patience**
- **“Silver lining”** – What have you learned from this experience that you might not have known otherwise?

The Beauty of Caregiving
Acceptance

- Not giving up or giving in, not a passive resignation of defeat.
- Recognizing that the more we avoid or fight the situation, it’s still there and can even grow stronger.
- Instead: softening, embracing, “sitting without judgment” of the situation “in the moment”

Relationships

- Mutual respect
- Rules and clear boundaries
- Creating time for each other, balanced with your individual pursuits
- Honesty about feelings
- Privacy
Communication

- Problems become smaller if you confront them, rather than dodge them.
- Passive / Aggressive / Passive-Aggressive / Assertive communication styles
- Use “I” statements rather than “You” accusations

Addressing suicidal thoughts

- Don’t be afraid to ask if you notice warning signs – this does not “put the idea into their head”
- Listen deeply – serious and should not be ignored
- Show empathy, not shame or guilt
- Get medical help if imminent; new National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
Self-Care

Mind Full, or Mindful?

But, how could I possibly find time for myself?

- Are you acting out of pity (see loved one as a victim you must rescue) or compassion?
- Your self-care benefits the person you’re caring for as well.
  - Pacing
  - Delegating
  - Acknowledge your strengths
  - Talk it over
  - Nurture your body - nourishing food/hydration/movement/sleep
  - Feed your soul - mindfulness, gratitude

Summary/Recommendations

- Don’t try to be Super Caregiver
- Do allow yourself to grieve the loss of your old routine
- Do know it’s okay to share your struggles, even with your loved one
- Do “address the elephant in the room”
- Don’t over-attend to pain behaviors
  - Don’t ask about the pain every day
  - Don’t rush in to offer help unsolicited
- Have a sit-down meeting to re-set dynamics/boundaries if necessary
- Do use “I statements” to communicate
- Do try a team approach
- Don’t isolate yourself
- Do take care of your own health
- Do practice self-compassion
- Do go have some fun
Resources for Further Support: Pain

“Understanding Pain” on Tamethebeast.org

Resources for Further Support: Self-Compassion

Two recommended meditations:

- **Loving-Kindness Meditation** (for self-compassion, empathy)
- **Mountain Meditation** (for strength in the face of chaos)
  - YouTube
  - Apps such as Calm, Headspace
  - [https://drronsiegel.com/recorded-meditations/](https://drronsiegel.com/recorded-meditations/)

https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/
Resources for Further Support: Podcasts +

https://painbc.ca/

https://www.spreaker.com/user/painwaves/painwaves-episode-family-caregivers-of-b

Resources for Further Support: RSDSA / RSDS.ORG
THANK YOU.

Q&A