The Importance of Support for Rheumatoid Arthritis Patients

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How a Good Support System Can Help Foster Support for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Having rheumatoid arthritis can be an incredibly lonely experience.

RA can take away your ability to function the way you previously did. While many people with RA are able to live a full and normal life there are many concessions to be made, which may include changing careers or living on disability. It can also mean no longer being able to participate in or enjoy the things you once did.

This can have a profound impact, especially if the thing you can no longer do was something you were considering for a career, or something that you looked forward to doing every day or week.

Additionally, many people with RA may have never met another person with RA, and therefore may feel incredibly alone or isolated in their experiences, which is why support for rheumatoid arthritis is so important. This is even more likely for teens and young adults who develop RA. The sense of isolation and feeling like no one understands what you're going through can be overwhelming.

RA can also take a huge toll on your relationships with both friends and family members. Occasionally, there will be people who just don't understand what RA is, and may even accuse you of exaggerating symptoms which is difficult to deal with. It is already hard to cope with your own disappointment when you miss out on things in your life. Having to comfort and reassure someone else at the same time only adds to the frustration.

Emotional Support from Friends and Family

A good support system is invaluable when dealing with RA, and I cannot stress enough how much it is needed. This support for rheumatoid arthritis could come from a good friend, a partner, or even a therapist whom you can trust and talk to on a regular basis about how you are feeling about dealing with RA.

These feelings can range from frustration to anger to depression. At times these emotions can make you feel downright desperate, which makes it all the more important that you are able to seek advice from friends and family, and in some cases a trained professional, to help you navigate the crazy ups and downs.

There may be times with RA when simply getting out of bed is too difficult, or you are sequestered in your house for weeks at a time dealing with fevers and fatigue. This can heighten your sense of depression and isolation, and may make things seem even worse and more desperate. This is why reaching out is so important.

Emotional Support from Other People with RA

A support system that includes other people with RA is very important. Often, friends and family can provide an ear and offer support, but they cannot provide the empathy that only others with your disease can.

Making friends with other people with RA can foster a deep connection, one that you may not be able to make elsewhere in terms of discussing how RA is affecting you.

These groups can also help with medication suggestions, tips and tricks for dealing with symptoms, how to speak to your doctor, and how to keep relationships on track in the wake of the disease.

If you have a rheumatologist, it is worth it to ask them if there is a local RA group that meets in your area. It may be best to meet with people in person, particularly if you are on disability or are feeling unwell, as it can provide you with a much needed outlet in terms of socializing and leaving the house.

However, sometimes there just isn't an RA group nearby or you are feeling too unwell to attend. In this case, online forums and Facebook groups for RA sufferers are very effective. This way, you can typically get very quick advice from others and call upon support when needed.

Practical Support

Living with RA isn't just about emotional support though. Sometimes you'll need support just to get through the day, which is where a spouse, good friend, family member, or parent comes in. Although most people will not need full-time caregivers, every so often it is going to be incredibly helpful to have support when it comes to things like cooking meals, feeding and walking pets, or watching your children.

Having a good friend or family member come over to help you cook some meals that can be frozen for when you are flaring is an excellent way to help ensure you and your family members are fed when you're not feeling your best. You can also opt to hire a cleaner to come help you every once in a while so that housework doesn't feel overwhelming, or have a good friend or family member come over to help you.

Other support hacks to keep life going include hiring mobile services to come to your house. This can include having someone come in a van to groom your dog (I have done this for years and it is an absolute lifesaver), or having someone come to your house to cut your hair or perform other beauty services (this is especially helpful if you're dealing with RA and hair loss). This type of support can ensure that you and your family members are looking and feeling your best, even when RA is rearing its ugly head.

Remember, you don't have to do it alone.