Dealing With a Lack of Empathy for OA

by ALI ESFAHANI

How to Cope With a Lack of Empathy From Others

Before I jump into an article that discusses how one can cope without empathy, I want to define the term. So, what is empathy?

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. In other words, you observe another person experiencing a significant event and try to put yourself in their shoes. You're supposed to contemplate the emotions and thoughts running through their minds; only then can you truly connect with another human being and understand what they are going through at that moment.

A more important question is why is empathy lacking today? Why do people lack empathy and understanding towards chronic diseases such as osteoarthritis (OA)?

I don't have an exact answer for these questions, but there are a couple of factors I attribute to perpetuating this phenomenon. First is the "rat race" factor: in this day and age of hectic work schedules, endless deadlines and increasing responsibilities, it seems difficult to fit in an extra activity that takes time and effort.

Another pervasive trend is what I call the "selfie effect:" people are so busy focusing on displaying the perfect image of themselves on social media that they simply don't care to entertain another human's perspective. In other words, our society is progressing towards narcissism fueled by social media and other social outlets.

Another valid question is why is empathy so important? It doesn't increase your salary, doesn't help you lose weight, and doesn't add more followers to your Instagram account. That being said, it does help you become better and a more caring human being.

We all need empathy to help us connect and make us more willing to help each other when we are struggling. It could also help improve most of the meaningful relationships you have in your life!

When you have OA, you get used to a lack of empathy from others. But how do we keep it from bringing us down?

Try to Keep a Positive Mindset

You can’t always control your physical condition or the amount of empathy in your environment, but you can have control over how you react to them. Keeping a positive mindset can have a drastic impact on the quality of your daily life.

In order to overcome the negative thoughts and pessimism that can come with a lack of understanding, we have to embrace the philosophy of looking at the glass as half full. Part of this strategy involves avoiding negative influences that remind you of the pain and how it has limited your life.

It helps sometimes to maintain perspective that there are others out there suffering equally or worse than you currently are, and there are still many blessings in your life to be thankful for.

Next page: support, and learning to increase your coping skills.

Support

How can we find support if *everyone* lacks empathy? Fortunately there are people who still have time to care and provide support — you just have to find them.

It is very important to surround yourself with positive people who can reinforce the idea of thinking positively. They will also be able to help bring you up emotionally when you're having trouble being positive on a particular day.

This goes back to the idea of support: when you are with someone who is supportive, they understand your struggle and will participate in activities you can also participate in despite having chronic pain. Pain sufferers deal with negative thoughts throughout the day with constant reminders of what we are incapable of doing, which can lead to a constant bad mood and bad attitude. However, support can help us get through the constant physical and emotional obstacles.

Support can come in a variety of forms: it could be someone who helps with tasks you are physically unable to do, someone you talk to about your struggles, or someone who is going through the same ordeal. Make sure to identify who your support is so you know who to turn to when you're having a rough time.

Potential support could be a trained therapist, significant other, close friend, family member or even a pet! Even if you can't identify a person, joining a support group or online forum for OA can be just as effective.

Support groups can be very helpful in breaking a person out of mental state brought on by pain. Talking with others about your struggle with arthritis will allow you to better cope with the condition.

Learn to Increase Your Own Coping Skills

This is a fancy way of saying "grow a thicker skin and learn to deal with it." Ultimately, OA sufferers should learn the tools to be better prepared for the occasional disappointment, lack of understanding and resentment other people may have towards their condition.

It is a fact of life that not everyone, no matter how educated they are, will care to help or understand what another person is experiencing. You can't control the way other people act — but you can control your reaction to them.

Learn to not take it so hard family or friends question the validity of how you feel. It is a very unpleasant experience to come in contact with someone who does not understand or believe you, but there are people out there who care and will try to help you.

The difficulty of living with OA can be magnified when those around you lack understanding or empathy. A lack of empathy can be caused by a variety of reasons; people feel they are too busy nowadays to have time to put themselves in another person's shoes and social media has influenced people to focus more on their own perspective.

The lack of empathy to a person's pain can be devastating and can lead to a general mistrust in others. There are a couple of methods to combat and cope with the lack of understanding others may have about arthritis.

These methods include trying to keep a positive mindset about your circumstances, finding support, and simply increasing your own coping skills from within. The lack of understanding others may have is hard to prevent, but there are ways of overcoming such deficiencies.

You may not ever be able to diminish the pain from OA, but you can learn to control how much of your mindset it affects.