

COMMUNITY

Family Counseling Service: Living with a Chronic Health Condition

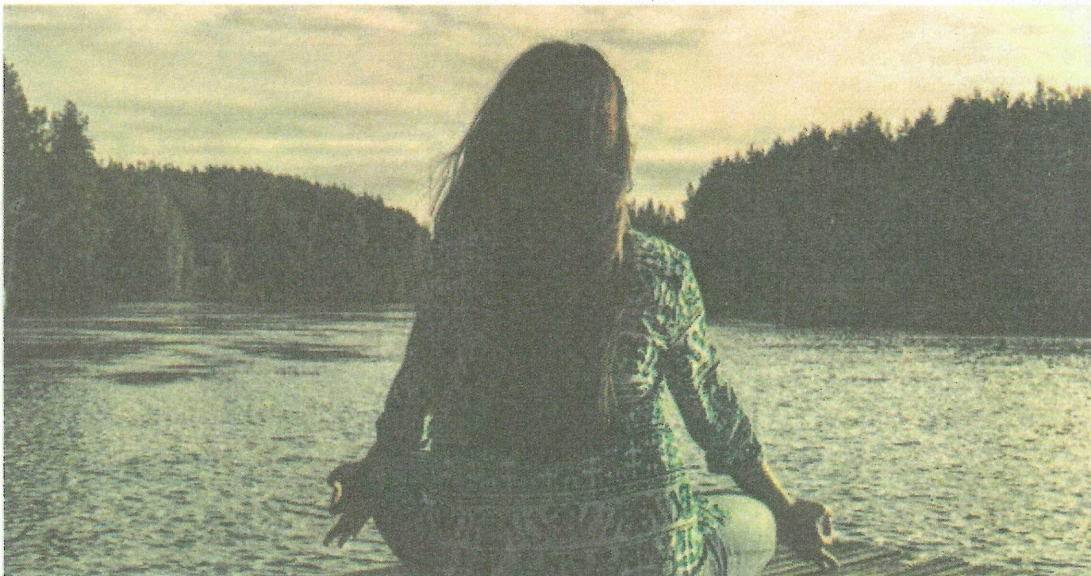
BY LARRY DEEVERS

According to the Center for Disease Control, over 60 percent of Americans suffer from a chronic health condition. That means the majority of people have had to adapt to some physical limitations in their daily lives. When these conditions have a significant impact on our quality of life, it can become a daily struggle to maintain a positive attitude, to sustain relationships, and continue to find joy in our activities. Here are some tips on managing these challenges.

Keep up your physical activity. Do whatever you are physically able to do, no matter how small it seems. Just to get moving can improve your mood and energy level. Even if you can only perform some physical activity as you lie in bed or sit up in your chair, putting your effort into it and doing it consistently will provide a sense of accomplishment that improves the way you see yourself and the way you feel. This seemingly small accomplishment each day can help build momentum as you find other ways to continue giving attention to the people and activities you value.

Live your life in spite of your condition. Your limitations may mean you have to find new ways to do what you used to, or that it takes you longer to do them. Maybe you have to involve more people to help or change the goals for what you can accomplish. When you adopt the mindset that you are going to be in control of your life, rather than allowing your illness to call the shots, you generate a sense of determination that strengthens you to continue the activities and relationships that are important to you.

Let go of anger, bitterness, and envy.

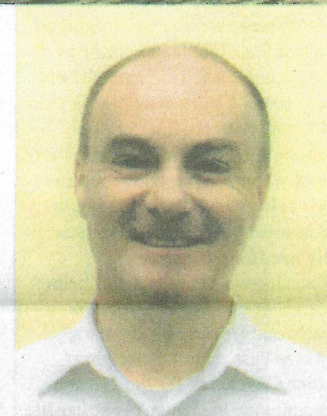


Yes, this much easier said than done. Choosing to live with a sense of grace towards others is a decision that only you can make – and making it may not get any easier than it is today. At some point, you have to take a leap of faith and choose grace over resentment. You have to consciously choose to let go of any bitterness you have towards others who don't have the challenges that you do. This will further empower you to wrest control of your life away from your illness by continuing to value and grow your personal relationships with friends and family. Holding onto resentment only damages your relationships and your own emotional health.

Set daily goals. Give yourself a reason to keep moving, to stay focused and to push yourself. Many people limit them-

selves only to activities they “feel like” doing. Often, the desire to do something comes only after we have taken those first few steps into it. Don't allow yourself to be held captive by your feelings. As you begin accomplishing small tasks, they can give you the momentum to keep going and accomplish even greater tasks.

Accept yourself. Let go of any guilt you feel over your limitations and over not being able to simply will yourself to better health. The more you can accept your circumstances, the easier it will be to develop the can-do attitude that says you can still accomplish meaningful goals, even if it is uncomfortable or difficult. The less attention you give to wishing things were different than they are, the more joy you will find as you engage in your activities and relationships.



Larry Deever is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and Executive Director of Family Counseling Service of West Alabama.