

## Living with Invisible Illness: 5 Ways to Get Over Aggravations

"But you look fine. Are you sure you're as feeling as bad as you say?" "You haven't really experienced chronic fatigue until you've tried to raise three children on your own!" "I think it you just got out of the house more and didn't think about it so much, it may just heal itself." "If you were serious about trying to get well, you'd at least try those vitamins I recommended. It never hurts to try."

And the comments go on. . . and on.

And it hurts.

You may be surprised to hear that nearly 1 in 2 Americans has a chronic illness or physical condition that impacts their daily life. The range of diseases and included everything from migraines to diabetes, back pain to fibromyalgia, and arthritis to cancer. One of the largest emotional obstacles for people who suffer from illness is coping with the invisibility of the pain and feeling like no one understands what they deal with on a daily basis. And they are justified in these feelings, as about 96% of illness is invisible, meaning the person who suffers from the chronic condition show no outward signs of physical pain or disability. An assistive device is not needed like a walker or wheelchair. But the incredible pain one experiences each day can be disabling within the confines of the home.

If you have an invisible illness here are 5 ways to forgo some of the frustrations:

[1] Let go of expectations. This may be a life-long process, but you will consistently find that people will always disappoint you, as no one is perfect-including you! Remember, you don't understand the difficulties that your friends are going through, whether it's a divorce, the death of a loved one, a loss job, an ill child, etc. Your illness is significant in your life. Even when people care, they still will have significant things going on in their own lives.

[2] Find supportive, caring friends. If there is someone in your circle of friendships who is constantly belittling you or distrustful about your illness, this should be a relationship to end. If it's a relative, distance yourself as much as you can. Illness gives us an opportunity to help us prioritize our friendships. With limited energies we should surround ourselves with those who at least can give us the benefit of the doubt and acknowledge our illness exists.

[3] Search for blessings in your life. Make a commitment to stop dwelling on how badly you feel, and instead search for ways to bring more joy into your life, even if it's just appreciating the small things. What are you doing when you feel natural adrenaline kick in and give you extra energy? Most likely, that's where your passions are! Bring more of these into your life. And don't let your limitations stop you. For example, if you once loved to garden, now you could grow a few potted flowers or hire a neighborhood teenager to plant some vegetables and set up an automatic sprinkler system. If you want to aim high, consider starting a garden consulting business.

[4] Use your talents and skills for things you care about. If you're no longer able to work because of your illness, you may feel like your skills are going to waste. Maybe you've always wanted to write children's books or be a business consultant. Find a place to plug in and do some volunteer or part-time work for to be able to use these skills in an area where you feel passionate. Instead of focusing on what others aren't providing you with that you want so much, follow your dreams and give that gift to yourself.

[5] Encourage someone else. You personally know how hard it is to live with illness and to feel like no one understands. So take time to be vulnerable with someone else who is going through this. Whether you meet someone through an online group such as National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week's message boards, or through your local support group, volunteer your time and expertise (yes, you're an expert on living with invisible illness!) and use it to make someone else's journey easier and you'll find your own is more enjoyable too. Are you frustrated that no one at your church thinks your invisible illness is real? Rather than stop going to church, find ways to educate them, such as a column in the church newsletter or brochures about National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week. These say what to say/not to say to a chronically ill person.

We can't change other people-but we can educate them and give gentle advice about how many people live with invisible illness. Then we much work on ourselves. You'll find that even when you want to change it can be difficult. It requires discipline and motivation for a better life. You owe it to yourself and finding joy in your life despite invisible chronic pain will improve both your mental and physical health.

### About the Author

Get a free download of 200 Ways to Encourage a Chronically Ill Friend from "Beyond Casseroles" by Lisa Copen when you [signup for HopeNotes](#) invisible illness ezine at Rest Ministries. Lisa is the founder of [Invisible Illness Awareness](#)

