



Spotlight On Disability

Living Well With A Disability

Living with a disability can be difficult, rewarding, obnoxious and exhausting. This may not be the life we imagined for ourselves (if we have a disability that started later in life, especially) but disability doesn't automatically mean we have a poorer quality of life than people without disabilities do.

All people, whether they have disabilities or not, have days that are a 2 - or even a 0 - on that scale of 1-10. And we all have days when we feel good and are tempted to jump in and do things that maybe we aren't supposed to do. The secret is to balance things out. That leads me to my first suggestion for living well with a disability: Listen to your body. It may tell you two hours after you do something that you shouldn't have done it, but make sure next time you choose to do it that you remember how much recuperation it took.

If you have the time to recuperate, you may go ahead and do the task that causes you so much pain, fatigue or other symptoms. Or you might just decide to leave it for someone else to do. The secret is to know who you are, and what your body can, and can't, do!

The second suggestion I have is for you to find a doctor whose advice you trust, and one who you can speak with honestly. If you can tell your doctor the reasons why you don't exercise, or why you eat too much sugar, or why you don't follow his or her directions to the letter, you'll have a much better chance to live well with your disability. Perhaps he or she can assist you in making it easier for you to avoid the problems associated with your disability, but he or she can only do this if you are able to be honest. Hiding information from your doctor can be extremely detrimental to living well with a disability.

Find out everything you can about your disability. That's my third suggestion for living well. But find it out on reputable websites or through visits with knowledgeable doctors, support groups, or organizations. Any one of us might type our disability's name into a search engine online, and some of us will seize on the horror stories that we find there. Know that the most likely reason for someone with a disability to be maintaining a website regarding that disability is that the disability has a large effect on his or her life. What follows is that the stories online are generally going to be more serious than the stories you might hear in real life about someone with your disability.

Find out what medications work, what treatments work, what you can do to help yourself. But do your research with the full knowledge that no two people are the same, and no two people are going to have the same experiences with a disease, or with the treatments for that disease.

Living well with a disability requires something that is extremely difficult for many of us: acceptance. Accept that you have a disability. Accept that it makes you unique from all other persons, whether they have a disability or not. Know that your experiences in life will make you deal with your disability differently than any other person might deal with the same disability.

Acceptance helps us not to be angry when someone doesn't understand that there are things we cannot do due to our disability. If we can accept others' limitations, whether it's the fact that our friend thinks she

can solve every problem with the right dosage of vitamins or that our husband never cleans the house, then we have to accept our own limitations. None of us can live well, with a disability or otherwise, until we accept what we can and cannot do.

If you have questions about your particular disability, please contact your Independent Living Specialist. He or she can research for you and find information that might make it easier for you to live well with your disability.