

Invisible Illnesses

Awareness and common sense tips from experts can support those around us who suffer in silence

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Diabetes, Lyme Disease, and gastrointestinal conditions. Invisible illness plagues over 26 million Americans. The term “invisible” refers to illnesses that aren’t easily observable.

Imagine sleeping a healthy amount every night, and still being tired. A type of tired that coffee can’t fix, that never goes away, and only seems to get worse as the day goes on. Sufferers of many invisible diseases endure a life much like this—a life deprived of energy and vigor.

Invisible illness lurks in the shadows. It makes its way into the lives of everyday people and has no mercy. Sufferers are expected to go on with everyday life, and expected to conduct lives like healthy people.

Many invisible illnesses are accompanied by depression, another life-altering disease.

Depression can exacerbate symptoms of diseases that are “physical,” especially when it brings with it anxiety. Patients can spend days in bed, without moving, without eating or drinking, and without any break from their disease.

So how can we help those who are affected?

Many health professionals have suggestions:

Be mindful of symptoms.

Someone who takes the elevator rather than the stairs could suffer from fa-

tigue or arthritis. They aren’t just “lazy.” **Don’t blame the victim.**

For many patients, it is hard to function without support. Self-destructive behaviors are very common among the clinically depressed, and it can be frustrating to understand why. **Be empathetic.**

Even if it is hard to understand someone’s symptoms or problems, extend compassion and try to validate what they are feeling. **Remember circumstances.**

Someone suffering from an invisible illness must go on with life, which can be twice as hard as it is for someone who is not. **Lessen the burden.**

Offering real help to someone with invisible illness can make a serious impact. Helping with homework, or covering their shift could improve their day significantly.

Ninety-six percent of people with chronic medical issues live with a condition that is invisible. They suffer in silence.

People in the hall, the grocery bagger, teachers; anyone could be affected. Isn’t that fact alone a call to sympathize? To outwardly express compassion and extend support?

We truly have no idea what people are going through and what kind of world they live in.

Supporting a community that is silent and suffering plants hope in the hearts of those affected.



Facts About Invisible Illness



An illness or accident will keep 1 in 5 workers out of work for at least a year before the age of 65.

Chronic pain affects an estimated 116 million American adults and costs the nation up to \$635 billion each year in medical treatment and lost productivity.

In 2014, about:

1 in 5 American adults experienced a mental health issue
1 in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression

1 in 25 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression

Sources:

mentalhealth.gov

Life and Health
Insurance Foundation
for Education

iom.edu

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