



Ten Strategies for Adapting to Disability

Pamela A. Cazzolli, RN

www.alscareproject.org

1. Express your feelings with people who care about you.

Each new loss of mobility is unique and may be experienced as the first. Grieving is normal, and therefore, sadness and crying are normal. Sharing how you feel can help you to manage depression, develop a positive outlook and identify solutions for dealing with your disability. Some people benefit from attending support group meetings where they can share their feelings with others that have similar experiences. Everyone needs someone to talk to.

2. Maintain an effective method of communication.

If your speech is difficult to understand, find a means to communicate that is the quickest and most reliable. People with a low voice volume might try a voice amplifier. Other methods include use of writing aids, pushing keys on a hand-held device, accessing a computer with a voice synthesizer or selecting letters or words on a

card. Effective communication not only provides a means to express your wishes, but also is necessary for quality of living. Maintaining communication also minimizes feelings of helplessness and emotional instability and helps prevent misunderstandings and conflicts in family relationships.

3. Focus on your abilities rather than disabilities.

Use assistive devices if necessary to simplify activities of daily living. Do not resist obtaining a wheelchair if walking safely is a risk. Seek evaluation with a physical or occupational therapist to learn better methods for enhancing mobility if necessary. Use of home equipment such as a power lift chair, an electric bed, wheeled commode, and bathtub bench can help make the home more accessible and life much easier. The goal is to promote "normalization" of life whenever possible.

4. Acknowledge your limitations and plan goals that are realistic and achievable.

This will help you to avoid getting too discouraged and giving up. Replace old

expectations with new ones. Strive to maintain a purpose for living. Discuss plans for the future to keep hope alive. Hope gives life meaning. Hope involves the expectation that life will be a little more comfortable, a little more meaningful tomorrow.

5. Maintain control of your life and decisions about your care.

You have the right to accept or refuse any treatment. Obtain accurate, sufficient and understandable information for making informed decisions and the best decisions. Taking charge of your healthcare helps minimize feelings of powerlessness.

6. Maintain regular contact with people, despite problems with mobility.

Whenever possible, take trips, visit family members or friends, attend church or social, school or sport events. If traveling is difficult, invite people to visit you or keep in touch with others on the phone. If speech is impaired, consider using a voice-synthesized computer or a teletypewriter for phone communication. Nowadays people who are home-bound with a computer can also keep in touch with others on

email or through online support networks for people with disabilities.

7. Plan for pleasurable activities.

Identify something that is realistically possible to do and enjoy. Find ways to experience laughter. Watch comedies or musicals on videos and television or go to the theater. Think of humorous stories to share at get-togethers.

When alone, people who have a computer can spend hours every day using the Internet to access information on any subject, as well as communicate with people around the world. The Internet also provides a means of sharing funny stories. Everyone should always have something to look forward to and something to do, despite disability. This will alleviate boredom and promote life satisfaction.

8. Try to maintain a positive self-image.

Share past accomplishments or happy memories with family and friends. This will help in re-capturing previous feelings of self-worth. Display pictures or personal items to reminisce the good old days and to promote discussion of noteworthy events and achievements. Also, strive to look your best to help you overcome

being too self-conscious or embarrassed by physical changes. This will promote a sense of well-being and self-confidence that may encourage you to leave home or invite friends in to visit.

9. Allow others to help you.

If activities of daily living or managing your household become difficult, consider hiring home health aides or homemakers to assist you. Check your health insurance benefits to see what home care services are covered. Also look for possible resources in your community for help. This may include healthcare organizations, which might offer home care, family counseling, support groups, home medical equipment, transportation, homemaker and volunteer programs. People who do not seek help when they need help will become overburdened, leading to ineffective coping, helplessness and despair.

10. Establish and / or maintain a relationship with God.

Seeking spiritual assistance through prayer, pastoral counseling, attending worship services and meditation of scripture increases faith. And faith promotes the expectation of answered prayer,

victory and the strength to carry on. Fellowship with other believers in your spiritual community provides a supportive resource for sharing your burdens and for people to care about you, and minimizes feelings of loneliness. Being strong in your faith also helps alleviate the fear of tomorrow and will better enable you to enjoy today.

Reference:

1. Fraley AM. Nursing implications, the disabled. Chapter Three, in: Nursing and the Disabled, Jones and Bartlett Publishers (1992); Boston; pages 79-82.

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www.alscareproject.org
PCazzolliRN@aol.com
Toll Free: 866-TEAM-ALS

ALS Care Project, 4450 Belden Village St NW, Suite 202, Canton OH 44718

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