



**Chronic illness- Understanding,
living and responding**

**EQUIP AND INSPIRE
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OUTLINE



What is chronic illness?



What is the prevalence, and trends and challenges?



Understanding: Patient and Health workers



Patient: Living with chronic illness



What does the bible teach us?



Responding: Patient and Health workers

CHRONIC ILLNESS

Gradual onset, one year or more, never completely heals, needing ongoing care by self or others, visible or invisible to others, impacts life (burden of disease, premature death)

- 47% of Australians (11.6 million) have one or more of the 10 common chronic conditions. ([arthritis](#), [asthma](#), [back pain](#), [cancer](#), [cardiovascular disease](#), [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#), [diabetes](#), [mental health conditions](#), [kidney disease](#), [osteoporosis](#)).
- Mental and behavioral conditions, Back pain, Arthritis – top 3: next 3 – Asthma, Diabetes, Osteoporosis

Mental/Behavioural	Age 15 - 44	25%
Back pain	Age 45 - 64	23%
Arthritis	Age > 65	41%

- 20% of Australians - 4.9 million multimorbidity.
- Multimorbidity commoner in females.
- Multimorbidity commoner with advancing age.
- Chronic illness is increasing with increased life expectancy and better medical care.
- New: Chronic illness – Long COVID, CFS, POTS, Transplant and treatment related illness
- [Chronic disease Reports - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](http://aihw.gov.au)

10 Common Chronic Conditions for Adults 65+

QUICK FACTS



80%
have at least 1
chronic condition



68%
have 2 or more chronic
conditions



Hypertension
(High Blood Pressure)

58%



High Cholesterol

47%



Arthritis

31%



Ischemic/Coronary Heart Disease

29%



Diabetes

27%



Chronic Kidney Disease

18%



Heart Failure

14%



Depression

14%



Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

11%



Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

11%

Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Chronic Conditions Prevalence State/County Table: All Fee-for-Service Beneficiaries.

CHRONIC ILLNESS - UNDERSTANDING

- Long term
- Ongoing symptoms
- Ongoing investigations, treatment and medical care
- Difficult for complete recovery.
- Increased dependence
- Likely medical care till death
- Fear
- Family and future
- Job
- Uncertainty feeling of loss
- Increased dependency – Physical and cognitive
- Emotional stress
- Social avoidance
- Spirituality questioned? Challenged? Lost? Hope?

CHRONIC ILLNESS - UNDERSTANDING

Gradual onset, one year or more, never completely heals, needing ongoing care by self or others

[Chronic disease Reports - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](http://aihw.gov.au)

NATURE

- Single or multiple
- More with age
- Ageing
- Progressive illness – any system
- Terminal illness
- Unseen – mental health

IMPACT

- Morbidity
- Reduced capacity, greater morbidity
- Functional capability
- Uncertainty, medical attention, fear, fatigue
- Hopelessness, dependence, helplessness, “given up”
- Not understood, cannot explain
- Many – function well
- Some – function well with difficulty and support
- Others – degree of disability

LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

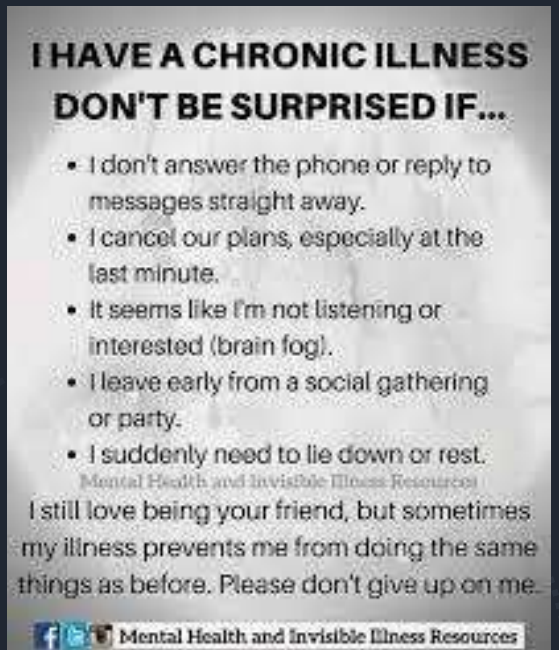
- I always feel guilty
- I feel like I am alone.
- I often have anxiety and depression.
- I am almost always in pain.
- Every healthy day is a gift.
- I don't look sick.
- It seems impossible to get out of bed.
- I am afraid to work and make plans or have a life.
- Exercise doesn't always help.
- Not all doctors understand me. My NDIS plan does not cover this service.
- I feel useless almost daily.

11 CONFESSIONS OF LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS invisible

1. I always feel guilty.
2. I feel like I am alone.
3. I often have anxiety and depression.
4. I am almost always in pain.
5. Every healthy day is a gift.
6. I don't look sick.
7. It seems impossible to get out of bed.
8. I am afraid—to work, make plans, or have a life.
9. Exercise doesn't always help.
10. Not all doctors understand.
11. I feel useless—almost daily.

Please don't be surprised with me!

- I don't answer the phone always or reply your messages straight away.
- I cancel the plans, especially at the last minute.
- It seems I am not listening or interested (brain fog).
- I leave early from a social gathering or party.
- I suddenly need to lie down or rest.
- I still love being your friend, but sometimes my illness prevents me from doing the same things as before. Please don't give up on me.





CFS – Seeing the world from the other side A sensitive conversation!

- My friends' biggest problem might be when they have kids, but for me I might not have the energy to even survive being married or having kids at all. It just makes you feel incredibly alienated because your life is so different.”
- Emma has found it really helpful when people acknowledge the gap.
- “If usefulness is the benchmark, it'll be hard for people with long-term illness to feel part of church.” – Leigh Hatcher
-

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes for chronic illness self-management by grandmothers.

Themes	Sub-themes	
Living with a chronic illness	Processing emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling shocked, confused, sad, and angry • Blaming self for acquiring HIV
	Adjusting to illness and to a new self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting and embracing the illness as part of ageing • Comparing self to others as a way of fostering self-motivation
	Integrating illness into daily life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reorganising everyday life in order to adapt to chronic illness
	Meaning making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illness as a pathway to end of life • Caring for grandchildren as sense of purpose
Focusing on illness needs	Following instructions from the healthcare workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment adherence • Eating healthy diet • Regular clinic attendance
	Completing health tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular medical appointments • Collecting treatment from the facilities • Adhering to treatment
	Performing health promotion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using home remedies, traditional medicine, and alternative therapy
Activating health resources	Healthcare resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular interactions with community healthcare workers • Seeking care from multiple healthcare facilities
	Spiritual resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular church attendance • Praying
	Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home remittances from adult children • Assistance with performing household tasks by grandchildren • Support with taking medication by grandchildren
	Community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in community saving clubs

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000895.t002>

Gumede D, Meyer-Weitz A, Edwards A, Seeley J (2022) Understanding older peoples' chronic disease self-management practices and challenges in the context of grandchildren caregiving: A qualitative study in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *PLOS Global Public Health* 2(9): e0000895. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000895>
<https://journals.plos.org/globalpublichealth/article?id=10.1371/journal.pgph.0000895>



Health worker:

** Managing your own chronic illness at work*

** Managing a person with chronic illness at work*

How do you deal with your chronic illness in the workplace?

1. Be honest with yourself. Your illness is a reality that you need to deal with, and you shouldn't deny it just because you're at work. ...
2. Find a balance between work and health. ...
3. Disclose your diagnosis sensibly. ...
4. Prepare for sick days. ...
5. Know your rights. ...
6. Research local sick leave laws.
7. If you are a believer commit your day to the Lord.

Isaiah 43: 1-2*: I have called you by name. You are mine.

CHRONIC ILLNESS: MANAGING A PERSON IN YOUR CARE AS A HEALTH WORKER

What you need to know?

- Understand and familiarize patient's medical condition, social environment, habits and routines that are dear to the patient.
- Understand your role in care in the team. Be prepared. Competence.
- Compassion, empathy, engage.
- Communication: regular, clear, timely, accurate.
- Acknowledge your limitations. You cannot meet every need of the person.
- Be conscious of the spiritual needs with respect and sensitivity.
- Be available to the patient.

CHRONIC ILLNESS – BIBLICAL RESPONSE – AS A CHRISTIAN WORKER- CAREING FOR MY PATIENT

- Be present **

“Oftentimes the service that is most needed is the ministry of presence without the expectation of a change in circumstances.”

- Listen - active – focus, engage non-verbally, do not interrupt, defer judgment, clarity in your mind
- Help when asked - “attentive conversation”
- Pray (in silence)
- Remember: Story of Salvation is a story of physical, emotional and spiritual pain.
- ***“Christ is not about trying harder: it means transferring our trust away from ourselves and resting in him”*** (Tim Keller)
Philippians 1:13 He enables us ..
- ***“We must meet the uncertainty of this world with the certainty of the world to come”.*** (A W Tozer)
Luke 1: 14 That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.
1 John 5: 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

The best thing you can do for your patients with chronic diseases is to let them run with the ball.

MARTHA M. FUNNELL, MS, RN

Fam Pract Manag. 2000;7(3):47-51

Patient says:

“I hate this exercise plan.”

“I don't think I can quit smoking.”

“I haven't been able to test my blood sugar four times a day.”

Health worker response:

(Old model)

“Then try walking after dinner every night with your husband for 10 minutes.”

“Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death...”

“It's hard at first, but just keep trying. You really need to keep track of it.”

(New model)

“What do you hate about it? What would help you do better at it?”

“Why do you think that? What has happened in the past when you tried to quit? What concerns you most when you think about trying to quit?”

“What is preventing you from doing that? Do you know what the numbers mean?”

Facing a chronic challenge – biblical encouragement?

Psalm 42

Lament 9&10, 42 & 43, Job 3



Personal, Seeking, honest



Unanswered questions – Why?



Chronic hidden suffering.



Highlights life is not neat and tidy.



No clear exit. No linear pathway through it.

- Honest with God – I will walk with you.
- Decides to hope in God – act of will.
- Talking to his own soul.
- Low and downcast so I need to do this. Others cannot. They can help.
- God’s character has not changed. Even when I am sick.
- The certainty in Jesus rises within.

CHRONIC ILLNESS – CASES IN THE BIBLE

- Luke 8:43 -48 A woman with bleeding
- Luke 18: 35 – 42 Blind beggar
- Luke 5: 17 – 26 Paralyzed man and the 4 friends
- John 9: 1-12 Man born blind
- John 5: 1-15 Healing at the pool in Bethesda
- Matthew 15: 21 – 28 A child demon possessed and the mother**
- Luke 17: 11 – 19 Healing of the Lepers
- Acts 3: 1- 10 Crippled beggar
- 2 Chronicles 16 :12 King Asa did not seek the Lord, but the physicians for the foot disease from the 39th to 41st year
- 1 Samuel 1 : 9 -20 Hannah and bareness – infertility
- 2 Kings 5: 1-14 Naaman and leprosy, Elisha
- 2 Kings 20: 1 – 7 Hezekiah with terminal illness
- Job 2: 6 – 7 boils head to foot
- Genesis 32 : 31 Jacob and his dislocated hip

Christians who lived with chronic illness

- Charles Spurgeon: Chronic gout, Depression, Gastrointestinal disorder
- Martin Luther Jn: Kidney stones, Gall stones, Depression, Chronic GIT and Liver symptoms. Life in monastery and earlier lifestyle. Suicidal
- Paul: A thorn in the flesh?
- Jacob: Dislocated hip

What does the Bible teach us about chronic illness?
Matthew 15: 21- 28

- Gentile, woman
- Comes pleading for mercy for her daughter.
- O Lord Son of David – Acknowledge
- Daughter and she are distressed, tormented
- Disciples tried to send her away.
- Jesus tested her.
- Faith of the mother – unswerving
- Persistent and desperate
- Negative or unwelcoming comments not a deterrent.
- Evokes a response from Jesus.
- Her identity (race, gender, religion, daughter's sickness) did not deter her.

Chronic illness from the bible – a common approach by the cases we note and the reasons to trust God in chronic illness

- They all actively pursued Jesus in the chronic illness.
- Honest about the illness.
- They directly engaged Jesus - going, responding, persevering, asking
- Trust the God who is reliable - James 1:17
- Trust in the God who is Able - Ephesians 3:20
- Trust in the God who is Truthful - John 17:17

“The chronic illness with God a journey of faith mixed with pain, loss, suffering, joy and victory in the eternal perspective”:



- Produces intimacy with God (Job 42:5).
- Equips to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).
- Refines us. Isaiah 48:10
- Produces growth and maturity (James 1:2-4) Confident of the end result.
- Conforms us into God's image (Romans 8:28-29)

Most chronic illnesses and suffering in many ways, remain a mystery, one that we will never fully understand this side of eternity. We can learn through chronic illness and suffering valuable lessons.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11: 28

