

LIVING WITH POST-POLIO SYNDROME.....

[NOTE: Article suggested by, and information provided by, Lois Jackman]

Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) affects approximately 75% of paralytic and 40% of other polio survivors. The symptoms occur about 35 years after the polio virus attack and include muscle and joint pain, muscle weakness, sleep disorders, overwhelming fatigue, heightened sensitivity to hot and cold, increased sensitivity to anesthesia, and also difficulty breathing and swallowing.

PPS are diagnosed by excluding all other possible causes for PPS symptoms, as there is no specific test to identify PPS. Generally, PPS symptoms are not life threatening, but polio survivors can experience difficulties waking up from anesthesia and can experience significant breathing problems from something as common as a local dental anesthetic.

PPS is caused by the body trying to do too much with too few damaged neurons. During a polio virus attack, up to 95% of brain stem and spinal cord neurons are damaged and at least 50% are killed. Those that remain “sprout” new connections to muscles and eventually suffer from overuse, fail and die, causing the muscle weakness and fatigue. Overuse of weakened muscles causes the muscle and joint pain.

Exercise is NOT the answer! Muscle strengthening exercise adds to overuse. The Post-Polio Letter Campaign suggests that most polio survivors have significant decreases in fatigue, weakness and pain once they start taking care of themselves and any sleep disorders are treated.

Polio survivors must walk less, plan rest periods throughout the day and stop activities before symptoms start.

The use of appropriate assistive devices, such as braces, canes, crutches, and wheelchairs, helps a great deal, but the polio survivor must often overcome life long efforts to appear “normal” and accept the reality of their new condition before they can accept the need to “eat breakfast, use a cane or rest between activities.”

Family and friends can help by recognizing that a polio survivor’s life style will need to change and accept the physical limitations that appear and the new need to perhaps replace the discarded childhood brace, and reduce daily schedules to manageable levels. Family and friends need to be willing to take on taxing physical tasks, which the polio survivor may be able to do but should not do.

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