Facts - stress and chronic medical illness

1. Stress is a common, natural response when you have been diagnosed with a severe or chronic medical illness such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic pain, Parkinson's disease or HIV/AIDS.

2. Some additional reasons that stress may coexist with a severe or chronic medical illness include:

   - Being diagnosed with a severe or chronic medical illness can be stressful for you and your family.

   - Accepting and dealing with the medical illness can easily cause stress.

   - A physical change may have occurred; for example, changes in the brain caused by a medical illness.

   - There may be uncomfortable side effects from medication(s) taken to treat the medical illness.

3. The stress of dealing with the news of your medical illness usually subsides after you allow yourself some time to accept your medical condition.

4. If you are experiencing a lot of stress that lasts a long time after your diagnosis, consider working with a health professional to help you deal with the feelings of anger, grief, sadness or frustration associated with your medical condition. Tell your doctor about all the prescription and non-prescription medications you are taking. While popular stress-fighting remedies such as herbal supplements may seem harmless, they may not mix well with the treatment you are receiving for your medical illness.

5. Dealing with your stress can help you better manage your severe or chronic medical illness.

   - If stress is negatively impacting your well-being and quality of life, ask your doctor for a complete evaluation to find out the cause of your stress.

   - If stress related to a severe or chronic medical illness doesn't go away, you might need to think about the following:

     - Talking to your doctor about changing or adding to your medication
     - Joining support groups
     - Attending counseling
     - Changing your lifestyle.

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