

Lifestyle Changes for Coping with Chronic Illness

Revitalize your health and renew your hope by implementing these simple strategies.

By Meredith Whitmore

LIVING WITH chronic illness is not just difficult — it can be physically, emotionally and even spiritually devastating. Millions of Americans struggle with various chronic illnesses every day. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that six in 10 Americans suffer from at least one chronic illness, and four in 10 adults have two or more of them — and the numbers are rising.¹ Furthermore, people with chronic conditions receive only 56 percent of recommended preventive healthcare services.

Coping with Chronic Illness

Finding ways to cope might seem easy to people who don't suffer from chronic illness, but those living with them know battling for better health, and even just implementing tools

meant to help cultivate it, is hard. Many patients lose hope in the process, but some simple strategies can help.

Lifestyle medicine specialist Mladen Golubic, MD, a professor and clinical medical director of the Osher Center for Integrative Health at the University of Cincinnati, says that slowing down or even reversing the damage from chronic illness boils down to five healthy habits: diet, physical activity, sleep, stress relief and social connectedness.² Many physicians and mental health experts add that radical acceptance, mindfulness, gratitude and spirituality also play a large part of healthy coping. The following evidence-based coping skills will give patients the tools needed to thrive instead of just survive. They require effort, discipline and commitment, but revitalized health and renewed hope are worth the personal sacrifice.



Cultivate Healthy Habits

While the effects of some conditions cannot be fully reversed, Dr. Golubic says that “Healthy lifestyle habits can slow or even reverse the damage from high cholesterol or high blood sugar. You can reverse diabetes, obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol and heart disease.”² The following lifestyle changes will benefit most, if not all, people suffering from chronic illness.

- *Clean up your diet.* Few of us need more information regarding what a healthy diet is. Such tips are ubiquitous from physicians, ad campaigns, magazines, health organizations and even the government. Still, Americans struggle to avoid oversized portions, excess sugar and overly processed food. Learn what foods are most appropriate for your specific chronic illness, then try incorporating changes. For example, diabetics should avoid meals high in carbohydrates; people with gallbladder problems should avoid high-fat foods; and people with celiac disease should follow a gluten-free diet. Also, the Mediterranean and ketogenic diets might help reduce the body’s overall inflammation and improve symptoms. Whatever the case may be, eat real food and remember to “shop the perimeter,” meaning avoid the highly processed, prepackaged food found on the inner aisles of the grocery store and stick to purchasing the healthiest, whole food found on the outer aisles instead. Do your research, consult your physician and experiment to find an eating plan that will help you most.

- *Get consistent physical activity.* This recommendation is not necessarily to perform extensive, grueling exercise routines used by professional athletes and CrossFit enthusiasts. Even light exercise is beneficial. You might be surprised by how easy incorporating it into your life can be: As few as 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week will help anyone. This can include walking for 10 minutes three times a day, and then climbing a flight or two of stairs as well once your body is in better shape. As Dr. Golubic says, “Simply move more and sit less.”²

- *Improve your sleep hygiene.* CDC reports that one-third of Americans do not get enough sleep.³ Improving your sleep hygiene (good sleep habits) can help you get the rest your body needs. First, make sure to include physical activity in your day. Avoid large meals, alcohol and caffeine before bed, and limit caffeine and alcohol in general. Then, aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Keep a regular bedtime, even on the weekends. Put digital devices away roughly an hour and a half before sleep, as blue light from a screen can

affect the body’s ability to produce melatonin, not to mention impede its ability to calm down after watching the news or something equally stressful or intense. Finally, make sure your room is dark and cool and your bed is comfortable.

Implement Stress-Relieving Strategies

Stress is part of everyone’s day. Not only does it — *ahem* — stress people out, but it also hurts our immune systems and raises the amount of cortisol in our bodies. (On a more positive note, it can be helpful to realize that stress can be a positive thing as well. Without it, we would not, for example, try to improve our lives at all, let alone with chronic illness.) Turning to things that make us feel better in the short term might seem to relieve stress, but these methods can hurt more than help. As Dr. Golubic says, “We tend to self-medicate with food, but there are healthier ways to relieve our stress, worries and concerns.”² Although there are many healthy methods to relieve stress, the most effective ways to combat it are radical acceptance, mindfulness and gratitude.

- *Radical acceptance.* Radical acceptance is a technique from dialectical behavioral therapy that, when practiced, helps us find substantially more peace, emotional regulation and distress tolerance, not to mention happiness. It involves wholeheartedly accepting the situations over which we have no control and letting go of the way we think things should be or should have been. Radical means *all the way*, not part of the way; acceptance means coming to terms with our circumstance, not believing our disease is acceptable or falsely telling ourselves that we are going to be without pain going forward. Acceptance means we stop fighting against reality through wishful thinking for things such as total relief, especially without some measure of effort on our part. Doing so wastes emotional energy that could be used in more helpful ways. It is a process to learn radical acceptance, and some might find it more difficult to do than others, but everyone who practices it wholeheartedly benefits both emotionally and physically.

- *Mindfulness.* On the other hand, mindfulness is fairly simple. Pay attention to your life *in the moment*. Stop borrowing time from the past or the future. For example, perhaps you feel nervous when you wait in a doctor’s office and begin to imagine worst-case scenarios. Recognize you are feeling that emotion, then refocus yourself by simply noticing the things you see, hear, feel, smell and, yes, even taste. Count how many items of one color you see in the room. Notice what song you hear playing in the background. Breathe

Protection from infection.

CUVITRU [Immune Globulin Subcutaneous (Human)] 20% is a primary immunodeficiency treatment that offers consistent Ig levels in between infusions, protection from infection,* and a flexible treatment schedule.^{1,2}

Your healthcare team will teach you how to administer CUVITRU, step by step, so you can infuse at home.¹

*The goal of the clinical study was to look at the rate of acute serious bacterial infections (ASBIs) in patients receiving treatment. Patients on CUVITRU experienced 0.012 ASBIs per patient per year, which is significantly less than the FDA's standard of 1 ASBI per patient per year for determining if the treatment works. Only one ASBI occurred in CUVITRU's clinical study; it was a case of pneumonia in a 78-year-old patient.



Your doctor is your best resource for questions. Learn more at [CUVITRU.com](https://www.cuvitru.com).

What is CUVITRU?

CUVITRU is a ready-to-use liquid medicine that is given under the skin (subcutaneously) to treat primary immunodeficiency (PI) in people 2 years and older.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

What is the most important information I need to know about CUVITRU?

CUVITRU can cause the following serious reactions:

- Severe allergic reactions causing difficulty in breathing or skin rashes

- Decreased kidney function or kidney failure
- Blood clots in the heart, brain, lungs, or elsewhere in the body
- Severe headache, drowsiness, fever, painful eye movements, or nausea and vomiting
- Dark colored urine, swelling, fatigue, or difficulty breathing

Who should not use CUVITRU?

Do not use CUVITRU if you:

- Have had a severe allergic reaction to immune globulin or other blood products.
- Have a condition called selective (or severe) immunoglobulin A (IgA) deficiency.

What should I avoid while taking CUVITRU?

- CUVITRU can make vaccines (like measles/mumps/rubella or chickenpox vaccines) not work as well for you. Before you get any vaccines, tell your healthcare provider (HCP) that you take CUVITRU.
- Tell your HCP if you are pregnant, or plan to become pregnant, or if you are nursing.

What are the possible or reasonably likely side effects of CUVITRU?

CUVITRU can cause serious side effects. If any of the following problems occur after starting CUVITRU, stop the infusion immediately and contact your HCP or call emergency services.

Treatment on my terms.

You and your doctor can create a treatment plan based on your preference—faster infusions or fewer needlesticks, but with a flexible schedule.



Faster infusions¹

In the study,^{*} once-weekly infusions took just under an hour.[†]



Fewer needlesticks¹

In the study, most (84.9%) used 1 to 2 needlesticks.^{*}



Flexible schedule¹

CUVITRU can be infused at the fastest rates of any subQ (up to 60mL/hr/site as tolerated).^{††} With the fastest rates of any subcutaneous Ig, CUVITRU can make treatment every 1 to 2 weeks a reality, even for patients with the highest volumes.

^{*}CUVITRU was studied in 77 people with primary immunodeficiency (PI) \geq 2 years of age, with the main goal of measuring how many acute serious bacterial infections (ASBIs) were experienced over the course of 1 year. ASBIs are short-term but serious infections that require immediate medical care.

[†]The average infusion time was 0.95 hrs (range 0.2-6.4 hrs).

^{††}You'll infuse your first 2 infusions at 10 to 20 mL/hr/site. After that, you'll be able to increase your rate, as tolerated. Infuse at up to 4 sites simultaneously.

References:

1. CUVITRU [Prescribing Information]. Lexington, MA: Baxalta US Inc.
2. Suez D, Stein M, Gupta S, et al. Efficacy, safety, and pharmacokinetics of a novel human immune globulin subcutaneous, 20% in patients with primary immunodeficiency diseases in North America. *J Clin Immunol*. 2016;36(7):700-712.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION, CONTINUED

- Hives, swelling in the mouth or throat, itching, trouble breathing, wheezing, fainting or dizziness. These could be signs of a serious allergic reaction.
- Bad headache with nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, fever, and sensitivity to light. These could be signs of irritation and swelling of the lining around your brain.
- Reduced urination, sudden weight gain, or swelling in your legs. These could be signs of a kidney problem.
- Pain, swelling, warmth, redness, or a lump in your legs or arms. These could be signs of a blood clot.
- Brown or red urine, fast heart rate, yellow skin or eyes. These could be signs of a liver or blood problem.

- Chest pain or trouble breathing, or blue lips or extremities. These could be signs of a serious heart or lung problem.
- Fever over 100°F. This could be sign of an infection.

The following one or more possible side effects may occur at the site of infusion. These generally go away within a few hours, and are less likely after the first few infusions.

- Mild or moderate pain
- Redness
- Itching

The most common side effects that may occur are:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

These are not all the possible side effects. Talk to your HCP about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Please see Important Facts about CUVITRU on the following page.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.



IMPORTANT FACTS about CUVITRU (CUE-vih-troo) [Immune Globulin Subcutaneous (Human)] 20% Solution

What is the most important information I need to know about CUVITRU?

CUVITRU can cause the following serious reactions:

- Severe allergic reactions causing difficulty in breathing or skin rashes
- Decreased kidney function or kidney failure
- Blood clots in the heart, brain, lungs, or elsewhere in the body
- Severe headache, drowsiness, fever, painful eye movements, or nausea and vomiting
- Dark colored urine, swelling, fatigue, or difficulty breathing

What is CUVITRU?

CUVITRU is a ready-to-use liquid medicine that contains immunoglobulin G (IgG) antibodies, which protect the body against infection. CUVITRU is used to treat patients with primary immunodeficiency diseases (PI).

There are many forms of PI. The most common types of PI result in an inability to make a very important type of protein called antibodies, which help the body fight off infections from bacteria or viruses. CUVITRU is made from human plasma that is donated by healthy people. CUVITRU contains antibodies collected from these healthy people that replace the missing antibodies in PI patients.

Who should not use CUVITRU?

Do not use CUVITRU if you have a known history of a severe allergic reaction to immune globulin or other blood products. If you have such a history, discuss this with your healthcare provider (HCP) to determine if CUVITRU can be given to you. Tell your HCP if you have a condition called selective (or severe) immunoglobulin A (IgA) deficiency.

How should I use CUVITRU?

CUVITRU is given under the skin (subcutaneously). Most of the time, infusions under the skin are given at home by self-infusion or by caregivers. Instructions for giving CUVITRU under the skin (subcutaneously) are provided in the FDA-approved patient labeling (Information for Patients and Instructions for Use). Only use CUVITRU by yourself after you have been instructed by your HCP.

What should I avoid while taking CUVITRU?

CUVITRU can make vaccines (like measles/mumps/rubella or chickenpox vaccines) not work as well for you. Before you get any vaccines, tell your HCP that you take CUVITRU.

Tell your HCP if you are pregnant, or plan to become pregnant, or if you are nursing.

What are the possible or reasonably likely side effects of CUVITRU?

The following are one or more possible reactions that may occur at the site of infusion. These generally go away within a few hours, and are less likely after the first few infusions.

- Mild or moderate pain
- Redness
- Itching

The most common side effects of CUVITRU are headache, nausea, fatigue, diarrhea, and vomiting.

If any of the following problems occur after starting treatment with CUVITRU, stop the infusion immediately and contact your HCP or call emergency services. These could be signs of a serious problem.

- Hives, swelling in the mouth or throat, itching, trouble breathing, wheezing, fainting or dizziness. These could be signs of a serious allergic reaction.
- Bad headache with nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, fever, and sensitivity to light. These could be signs of irritation of the lining around your brain.
- Reduced urination, sudden weight gain, or swelling in your legs. These could be signs of a kidney problem.
- Pain, swelling, warmth, redness, or a lump in your legs or arms. These could be signs of a blood clot.
- Brown or red urine, fast heart rate, yellow skin or eyes. These could be signs of a liver or blood problem.
- Chest pain or trouble breathing, or blue lips or extremities. These could be signs of a serious heart or lung problem.
- Fever over 100°F. This could be a sign of an infection.

These are not all the possible side effects. You can ask your HCP for a physician's information leaflet. Tell your HCP about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Whenever giving yourself treatments at home, you should have another responsible person present to help treat side effects or get help if you have a serious adverse reaction occur. Ask your HCP whether you should have rescue medications, such as antihistamines or epinephrine.

How do I store CUVITRU?

Store CUVITRU refrigerated or at room temperature.

- You can store CUVITRU in the refrigerator (36°F to 46°F [2°C to 8°C]) for up to 36 months or
- You can store CUVITRU at room temperature (up to 77°F [25°C]) for up to 24 months.
- Do not return CUVITRU to the refrigerator if you take it out to room temperature.
- Do not freeze.
- Do not shake.
- Check the expiration date on the carton and vial label. Do not use CUVITRU after the expiration date.
- Protect from light. You can use the original CUVITRU containers to protect it from light.

How do I get more information about CUVITRU?

The risk information provided here is not comprehensive. To learn more, talk about CUVITRU with your HCP or pharmacist. The FDA-approved Full Prescribing Information, including Information for Patients, can be found at www.CUVITRU.com or by calling 1-877-TAKEDA7 (1-877-825-3327).

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rhythmically. Put a piece of candy or gum in your mouth and savor it. Practicing mindfulness is as simple as paying attention to each present moment throughout the day. It grounds and even distracts us, preventing us from focusing on negative emotions, worry or pain.

• *Gratitude.* Practicing gratitude can rejuvenate your mindset, moving your focus away from pain and toward appreciation for the good things you have. “Throughout our days, we tend to notice more things that are not going well and pay little attention to positive moments,” Dr. Golubic says. “We are likely to feel better when, in the midst of a hectic day, we recognize and remind ourselves about all the gifts we have in life.”² It can be as easy as spending five minutes a day looking at life from a different perspective, counting your blessings and looking forward to good things ahead. Practicing gratitude literally rewires the brain, improving mental and overall health. Several studies have shown that gratitude brings positive effects on well-being within just a few weeks.

Find Meaningful Connection

• *Invest in others.* Social isolation is rampant in a world full of superficial relationships. It is worth finding ways to invest in authentic relationships with like-minded people. Reach out. Text friends and loved ones, go online and find support groups for particular illnesses, attend religious services — the point is, go out of your way to ensure you have someone to talk to, as well as someone else to support. Investing our lives in others, and cultivating our own social connections, is a key to mental and physical health. Not only can it mean a 50 percent improvement in our longevity, but it’s also fun!⁴ Never underestimate the value of that, even while living with chronic illness.


• *Seek out spirituality.* A new Harvard study conducted in collaboration with Brigham and Women’s Hospital found that people who incorporate spirituality into their lives are significantly healthier, both physically and emotionally. Lead author Tracy Balboni, MD, MPH, a senior physician at the Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women’s Cancer Center and professor of radiation oncology at Harvard Medical School, reports, “Our findings indicate that attention to spirituality in serious illness and in health should be a vital part of future whole person-centered care, and the results should stimulate more national discussion and progress on how spirituality

can be incorporated into this type of value-sensitive care.”⁵ Tyler VanderWeele, PhD, a professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, agrees, adding that “Spirituality is important to many patients as they think about their health.

Radical acceptance helps us find substantially more peace, emotional regulation and distress tolerance, not to mention happiness.

Focusing on spirituality in healthcare means caring for the whole person, not just their disease.”⁵ According to the study, spirituality involves the way we seek meaning, make sense of difficulty, find purpose and connection, appreciate the world and so on. For some, this might involve belief in God, while others may try to discover ultimate meaning through connecting with family, community or nature.⁵

Don’t Give Up

Some of these strategies may be difficult to implement simply because we are creatures of habit. When these routines are not already part of our lives, pain and illness often discourage and prevent us from learning or incorporating new healthy habits. That does not mean, however, that we are incapable or helpless. It means only that we must put in the effort. Although these habits might seem daunting, “doing it anyway” can yield healthy rewards the more we practice them. Learning new ways to cope with chronic illness is worth it. We are never without hope, and we can always learn new ways to feel better — as long as we don’t give up! 

References

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