



Pain Flares: A peer's perspective on the reality of pain flares during a national crisis.

As a person living with chronic pain and a person who works with providers and patients living with chronic pain, I wanted to write a little bit about how the Covid-19 outbreak has affected my life and acknowledge that others are probably feeling the same way.

Our nation is going through something that is very difficult for so many people, especially for those of us living with chronic pain and illness. Many of us are in the high-risk category due conditions we are living with in our day-to-day lives. The current added stress to our lives related to the Covid-19 crisis makes our pain conditions much worse than usual and could lead to a pain flare.

In my opinion, it's not a question of *if* a pain flare will happen, but *when*.

Stress is a major factor that contributes to pain flares under normal circumstances, let alone under the circumstances that we are currently facing.

How do we face this stress while already experiencing pain? Since we know that the stress is not going to lessen or go away anytime soon, we need to use tools that are available to us, tools we know give the best chance of not only surviving this difficult time, but becoming resilient.

Stress takes effort and energy that many of us don't have to begin with. *How do we restore that energy?* One great way is to use relaxation techniques. Simple meditations and mindfulness recordings are so easy and truly work! I have been using these resources every afternoon since the crisis started and they have really helped. Try: <https://www.meditationoasis.com/>.

Nutrition and hydration: Nutrition is critical and essential to help with stress and pain flares. This seems so simple and easy, but when we are hit with the kind of stress this situation is warranting, we can lose sight of the basics.

This subject is a strange one because food is often a way that we soothe ourselves during difficult times. I recently found myself stress-eating sweets. It seemed that the sugar-high overtook the anxiety attacks that I was having, so I convinced myself it was okay to eat the sweets. More sugar is not better, and actually the added sugar consumption was contributing to my flare-up while taking my anxiety away. I got myself back on track, and I am feeling much better. I am also boosting my immune system with vitamins and essential minerals, especially Vitamin C and Vitamin D. People who live with pain are typically low on these under normal conditions.

Fear: I am scared and I don't know anyone who is not scared. The fear that is surrounding this national crisis is being felt everywhere. For people living with pain and being categorized as high-risk, this fear is overwhelming and almost crushing at times. It is helpful to admit being scared and to talk about it with others. *How will this crisis affect my pain? My medication? What about my doctor appointments?* Everyone is looking



for answers to the difficult questions that the nation and the world are facing, and it is two-fold for people living with pain.

Isolation: This is such a difficult subject for people living with pain and chronic illness-because we tend to become isolated very easily anyway, and being mandated to stay isolated because of Covid-19 can really send us into a very dark place.

Hope: I don't know what is going to happen in the coming days, weeks or months, but I do know that people living with pain are the most resilient of populations. We are strong! We adapt...and we face difficulty head on. Pain gives a person a different perspective (a sort of super-power) on how to live life. Right now we need to use that perspective to help others and ourselves.

Along with this letter I am attaching a document that gives information on how to manage a Pain Flare-Up, how to make a **Flare-Up Kit** with specific recommendations for this crisis, and a list of very helpful resources. I am hopeful that this will help you all during this time.

Stay Safe and Healthy,

Michelle Marikos
Certified Peer Support Specialist for Chronic Pain

Resources for Chronic Pain Flare Ups