The Importance of Self-Management

Meet Darlene Twymon

Darlene Twymon, a 64-year old wife, mom, and grandmom has been living with painful, often debilitating, rheumatoid arthritis for over 45 years. Coupled with a diagnosis of fibromyalgia 20 years ago and osteoarthritis in her knee 2 years ago, the odds were stacked against her. But these diseases have not stopped her from leading a full and active life. Darlene has taken control of her diseases and adopted self-management techniques to help improve her health and the quality of her life.

Darlene, a retired finance manager living in Rochester Hills, Michigan, passionately believes in the importance of knowing how to manage her own disease. Darlene’s rheumatoid arthritis is especially bad in her feet and hands but she does not let the disease take over her life and she refuses to feel sorry for herself.

Following her doctor’s advice, Darlene stays active to maintain a good quality of life. She walks her dog every day and she thanks her puppy for ensuring she gets enough physical activity, but she also knows that walking helps improve her mobility and her mood.

Partnerships Are Key

As Darlene demonstrates, dealing with arthritis can be done alone, but is far more successful and enjoyable when different types of partnerships come together. Working with the doctor is essential. Discuss pain and symptoms as soon as possible with the doctor and also talk through an exercise plan. “Building regular exercise into your everyday routine is so important,” says Darlene.

People living with arthritis should combine physical exercise with other self-management techniques to help reduce pain. These natural (non-drug) skills are taught at low-cost classes in the community, such as Living Well, Taking Control of Your Arthritis Pain or PATH—Personal Action Towards Health. Darlene thinks it is important to engage fully with the instructors and other participants to get the most out of a self-management class. She found it helpful to build relationships with people who share these experiences. These relationships often develop into friendships. Over the years, Darlene has made many friends by being open and honest about her disease. Having close friends who understand how she is feeling and what she is going through is an essential support network she knows she may rely upon at some point in time.

Darlene practices what she preaches. She stays active every day with her family, her friends, her dog, her church, and her hobbies. She truly understands just how important exercise is and the positive effect it has on her whole body. Darlene wants everyone living with arthritis to educate themselves. She says, “There is help out there. But the most important thing you can do to live the life you want is to engage in regular low-impact exercise and go to a self-management course.” You never know, you might just run into Darlene at your local exercise class!