

## The Roller Coaster of Invisible Illness

### National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week 2007

*Living with invisible illness is a roller coaster. Help a friend hold on!*



Many illnesses, including those that cause chronic pain, are invisible. Yes, others can often see pain in our eyes, but the illness itself can be quite invisible. Often, there are no visible scars, wounds, or injuries. No crutches, wheel chairs, oxygen tanks, and so on. To others, these illnesses are invisible. Unfortunately, it's human nature to "believe" what we can see or touch, what we can actually feel. Those enduring invisible illnesses *can* feel them, but other can't. They look at us and see nothing wrong.

In a recent survey of 611 chronically ill individuals, done by the National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week committee, 53.27% of the respondents said that the most frustrating or annoying comment people make about their illness is "But you look so good!"

"Although telling someone they look good is often seen as a compliment, it feels like an invalidation of the physical pain or seriousness of one's illness and the suffering they cope with daily."

Lisa Copen  
founder, National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week

Respondents answered the survey at [www.invisibleillness.com](http://www.invisibleillness.com) and reported the following other annoying comments people tend to make:

- "Your illness is caused by stress." (14.22%)
- "If you stopped thinking about it and went back to work..." (12.42%)
- "You can't be in that much pain. Maybe you just want attention." (10.95%)
- "Just pray harder." (9.15%)

People fear what they don't understand, and many simply don't understand invisible illnesses. This fear can manifest itself in a number of ways...

- intolerance,
- ridicule,
- denial,
- discrimination, and
- avoidance.

### What can we do?

"When someone appears physically normal people are less likely to show understanding and compassion. National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week is an important opportunity to help families, businesses, churches, and communities understand that conditions without an outward sign are just as debilitating as other more visible illnesses and disabilities."

Carmen Leal  
creator of SomeOne Cares Christian Caregiver Conference  
author of *The Twenty-Third Psalm for Caregivers*

In the area of invisible illnesses, as with most illnesses, there are advocates, writers, health professionals, and others in visible positions who are working to dispel myths and misconceptions to lead others to a greater understanding.

No effort to educate and raise awareness is insignificant. We must start by educating ourselves about our condition(s) – symptoms, impact, available treatments, and the informational resources available. Then share the wealth! Sharing information and support with others who share our conditions helps them, and it helps us feel more confident and useful.

That knowledge can then be passed on to other people with whom we come into contact -- at social events, the pharmacy, the grocery check-out, everywhere. It's amazing how often we'll be engaged in a conversation where an illness is mentioned, and we'll have a chance to comment and educate others. Each of us can be a myth buster!

The theme for this year's National Invisible Chronic Illness Awareness Week, September 10-16, is, "Living with invisible illness is a roller coaster. Help a friend hold on!" During this week, let's be especially sensitive to the roller coaster of symptoms and emotions that go with invisible illnesses and help others learn and improve the quality of life for everyone with an invisible illness.

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Resources:

Press Release. "Who Hates to Hear They Look Great? Over Half of the Chronically III!" Rest Ministries. San Diego. August, 2007.

[National Chronic Invisible Illness Awareness Week Web site](#)

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