

Pain

Category: Surgery

written by Susan Cunningham | October 2, 2022

I am a PT with 38 years of clinical experience. Though I have many interests, the human experience of pain, especially where physical pain intersects with emotional pain, has been a patient-care focus of mine for some time now. I am also a mom of two, one of whom I lost to the disease of addiction six years ago. And recently, I have been an orthopedic patient, having had a partial knee replacement two months ago.

In all honesty, because of my experience as a clinician, I have been somewhat arrogant and exceedingly unrealistic in my expectations for myself and my recovery from my surgery. I was determined to use minimal narcotics, certain that I'd be able to manage the pain with ice, Advil, and Tylenol.

But then, two months later, though I had succeeded in my goal of making minimal use of narcotics (just five days), my pain suddenly intensified this week. Pain disrupted my sleep again, and my flexion range of motion became limited and painful. On stairs, I had to resort to what we PTs call a "step-to pattern," though I was doing reciprocal stair-climbing the past few weeks. What was going on?

Reflection was needed, and it didn't take long. Last Tuesday, when I was in the most pain, was the sixth anniversary of my son's death. Yesterday was the sixth anniversary of his funeral. My body was reacting to my grief with physical pain. Understanding this and literally taking it easy, physically and emotionally, has eased my pain.

Healing body *and* mind is hard, and I accept that I still have work to do.

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