



CPA Newcomer



*“... a fellowship for those with
chronic pain and chronic illness.”*

As a new member of Chronic Pain Anonymous (CPA), you may be wondering about a few things. We would like to share some answers to frequently asked questions about CPA and what happens at our meetings.

What is CPA?

CPA is a nonprofit worldwide fellowship of people from all walks of life who have chronic pain and chronic illness. Our members come together to support each other and learn how to find serenity and a meaningful life while living with the disabling effects of physical health conditions.

CPA is based on the Twelve Step program of recovery started by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Who can attend?

The only requirement for CPA membership is a desire to recover from the emotional and spiritual debilitation of living with chronic pain and chronic illness.

Some members of our fellowship are living with chronic pain related to injuries or physical disabilities, while others are living with illnesses such as cancer, arthritis, fibromyalgia, MS, and many others.

All are welcome, and only you can decide whether or not CPA can help you.

How can it help me?

At our meetings, we concentrate on our feelings and attitudes about our situation rather than on the situation's details. We reflect on how chronic pain or chronic illness has affected our thinking and our behavior. We talk about the part we play in our own problems and how we can change our attitudes and actions by applying the Twelve Steps in our daily lives.

We have simple tools in our program—such as the Twelve Steps, the Serenity Prayer, books, and fellowship—that help guide us toward

new attitudes. Please see the “Resources” section on the Chronic Pain Anonymous website to discover more.

Emotional and spiritual recovery are available to us no matter our physical condition. Through sharing our experience, strength, and hope, we find understanding and support. We are no longer alone.

How is this achieved?

Many of us have been unwilling to admit that our lives have become unmanageable. We often believe that we caused our chronic pain or chronic illness or that we can cure or manage our condition ourselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that our lives have been characterized by visiting countless doctors and trying many treatments in the hope that we can return to the life we had before. The idea that somehow, someday, we will fix our pain and illness is our great obsession. The persistence of this illusion can lead to increased anxiety, pain, isolation, despair, fear, and depression.

By applying the principles and tools in CPA, we learn how to live peacefully, joyfully, and comfortably with ourselves and others. As we interact with others who are living with chronic pain and chronic illness, we experience emotional and spiritual growth and replace isolation with connection and community. We learn how to acknowledge and accept hardship as a passageway to peace, one moment at a time. We experience trust as we surrender to our personal Higher Power and find strength, hope, and renewed purpose.

We achieve this by:

- practicing the Twelve Steps of recovery
- letting ourselves be guided by our Twelve Traditions
- giving comfort and understanding to each other
- developing a new relationship with our health conditions
- navigating challenges with kindness and self-compassion
- accepting life on life’s terms

Our primary purpose is to live our lives to the fullest by minimizing the effects of chronic pain and chronic illness and by helping others to do the same. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions embody a set of principles for recovering from the debilitation and isolation of chronic pain and chronic illness.

Do I need to sign up?

There is no need to register. On the CPA website, you can find more information about our meetings. Along with the local meetings, there are telephone, video conference, and online groups that enable people to attend meetings without having to leave their home or care facility.

Is CPA religious?

CPA is a spiritual program. Religious beliefs or lack of them are a personal choice. CPA is not allied with any religion. In our meetings, we refer to a Power greater than ourselves, and each person chooses how to define this Power. Everyone is welcome.

How much does it cost?

There is no charge for attendance. Contributions are voluntary and limited to members only (we do not accept contributions from nonmembers). We contribute because we are self-supporting and grateful for the benefits we receive. The funds support expenses to maintain CPA services. Donations can be made in person at meetings, through the CPA website, or by mail.

Does CPA recommend medical care?

As guided by Tradition Eight, CPA must remain forever nonprofessional. CPA has no opinion on and does not recommend or provide any sources of outside help.

The position of CPA is that the medications you take and the care you receive are between you and your healthcare provider(s). Medications and treatment programs are not discussed at our meetings. When referring to our own medical conditions, we find it best to speak in general terms.

What happens at a meeting?

Every member has been a newcomer and knows how intimidating the first meeting can feel. We strive to greet you with kindness, compassion, and an atmosphere of understanding. You are welcome to observe and listen in the beginning.

Meetings are led by a member. The format of each meeting differs slightly. Meetings usually last one hour, but the length can vary; check the website for exact times.

Example of a meeting format

- Meetings are often opened with a reading of the Serenity Prayer.
- There are introductory readings, which can include the Preamble, the Steps, Traditions, and the CPA Declaration.
- Members are invited to introduce themselves by first name. At nonphysical meetings, some people share their location.
- Sharing guidelines are read, and we are reminded that CPA is fully self-supporting through voluntary contributions. At a physical meeting, a basket for contributions is passed around.
- Members share on a topic based on CPA literature or one presented by a member.
- Members are invited to share their experience, strength, and hope, based either on the topic or on whatever they need to share about that day. Sharing is voluntary. Some newcomers may be ready to talk right away, while others may just prefer to listen.
- Meetings are often closed with a reading, sometimes the Serenity Prayer.

After the meeting has concluded, fellowship visiting begins. This is a good time to ask questions. It is also an opportunity to engage with one another and to share about our recovery and our lives. Members can also request contact information from other members, find a sponsor, and connect with the CPA community.

Between meetings, members stay in touch with each other. They use a variety of communication tools to stay connected, such as telephone, text, email, or writing letters. Some people in CPA contact other members and their sponsors regularly. Through these connections, members find an end to the isolation that is so common among those living with chronic pain and chronic illness.

Common terms

Anonymity - Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all Twelve Step programs, and CPA is no different. Anonymity provides members with assurance that what is said and who is seen at a meeting is not shared outside the meeting, so that everyone has a safe place to express their thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, anonymity is about equality and humility.

Conference Approved Literature (CAL) - CAL is written and approved by CPA members for the CPA fellowship and is written from the CPA point of view. CAL ensures that a piece of literature accurately represents a consistent voice of CPA members' experience, strength, and hope. These items go through a rigorous review process with input from the fellowship and professionals.

Crosstalk - Crosstalk is when a member interrupts another member or when one person responds directly to another who has shared or gives advice as to their situation. Sharing should be limited to one's own situation. Members listen to each other without criticizing or passing judgment. Every member is listened to with respect and courtesy.

Service - When we participate with others in supporting our group and our fellowship, we benefit. Whether it is sharing at a meeting, offering to chair a meeting, or attending a committee meeting, service is essential. Working with others and carrying the message is a part of our recovery, whether we are new or have been around for a while.

Sponsorship - Sponsorship is essential to the program of recovery. A sponsor is someone who has worked through, and regularly practices, the Twelve Steps and principles of the CPA program and shares their

experience with their sponsee, guiding the sponsee through working the Twelve Steps. Often, people simply approach a member whom they identify with and ask that member to be their sponsor.

In our members' words

CPA can make a huge positive impact in your life as it did in mine. When my life changed from somewhat normal to the restrictions of having never-ending pain and illness in my life, I struggled with grief, fear, loss of self-worth, depression, and sadness. I am so thankful that I found CPA. The program gave me hope, and as a result of what I learned in CPA, I now live a fulfilling and joyful life.

CPA taught me many tools to deal with the new challenges in my life, not to mention the benefit of being able to share with other people who get it because they too live with chronic pain and illness.

CPA can really help you and change your life for the better. We welcome you and hope you will keep coming back.

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I came across CPA when searching for support groups for my condition. I was aware of Twelve Step programs but was not entirely sure as to what they entailed.

As there are no face-to-face meetings in my town, I joined a video meeting online. I was immediately struck by the warm welcome I received from members and the genuine kindness and positivity that they exuded despite living with chronic pain and illness.

I was fortunate to quickly find a sponsor to start working the Steps. I am in touch regularly with my sponsor and have developed some wonderful new contacts and friends in the CPA fellowship.

Whilst I must admit that I am still coming to terms with the physical and emotional changes in my life brought about by my condition, my experience in CPA has helped me to obtain a different, more accepting perspective.

What's next?

You are invited to attend CPA's Newcomer's Meeting, held on the fourth Monday of each month. See the CPA website for more information. This is a good introduction to the fellowship.

Members have found it helpful to begin by looking at the meeting schedule on the website and finding some meetings to attend. Each meeting is different, so it works best to go to several different meetings and see which ones are best for you. You can stay after the meeting and meet others during fellowship time.

Visit the website and order some books and brochures so you can learn more about CPA recovery. We invite you to ask questions. Although CPA members live with health challenges, they generally are able to take time to connect with you and answer your questions.

Since living with chronic pain and illness...

1. Do you feel totally alone and that no one seems to understand?
2. Do you feel as if your life is out of control and unmanageable?
3. Do you find yourself wishing for your old life back?
4. Have you become isolated from friends and family?
5. Have you lost hope and a sense of purpose in your life?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, Chronic Pain Anonymous (CPA) may be able to help. We who live with chronic pain or chronic illness understand as perhaps few others can.

In CPA, even if you don't find someone with the same set of circumstances, it's likely you will still identify with the way many of us feel about the effects of chronic pain or chronic illness in our lives. Our experience has taught us that through working the Twelve Steps as suggested in CPA, it is possible to live comfortably, peacefully, and with joy, even while pain and illness persist.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over pain and illness—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps we tried to carry this message to others with chronic pain and chronic illness and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CPA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for CPA membership is a desire to recover from the emotional and spiritual debilitation of chronic pain or chronic illness.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or CPA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to people living with chronic pain and chronic illness.
6. A CPA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the CPA name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every CPA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Chronic Pain Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CPA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Chronic Pain Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CPA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television, film, and the Internet.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Thy will, not mine, be done.

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www.ChronicPainAnonymous.org

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