Living Together When Illness Strikes

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Being in a marriage or long-term relationship in normal times, has occasional challenges as well as great joy. However, the gap between challenges and joy closes when you are affected by a significant health issue, like hepatitis C and liver damage. Of course, it is difficult for the person being bombarded by various symptoms and results, but what is it like for the healthy person at home who must deal with the changes and take care of much more than they ever had to in the past? It can be, in a word, hard.

My example, at least part of it, may fit for you and your care-giving partner. I loved my job as an elementary school teacher, typically leaving early in the morning. After leaving school, I usually went running, biking, to the gym, or straight to our large garden. I was home before dinner with the whole clan (two boys) and an evening together as a family. I made enough money that was good enough when combined with my wife's part-time work. I had great health care and one vacation month of summer to not think at all about the classroom.

I was a dedicated endurance athlete for a long time, and my body was lean and strong. My wife appreciated that I was in good shape, and she let me know that in different ways. The parents and my students, for the most part, loved what happened as we built community and did school together; my wife was proud of my abilities and the reputation I had. We both loved camping and outdoor activities, and we both appreciated having a partner to enjoy the outdoors with.

However, ten years ago, when hepatitis started really affecting my liver, these things all changed. I received a liver transplant, and my body, strength and energy shifted significantly. That was hard for me, even though I found inspiration and healing that helped enormously. There are still ebbs and flows, and some recent frustrations. My wife is saddled with much more that she bargained for.

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