

Script – Broadcast – Don't ignore the silent signs of chronic illness

INTRO

Chronic illness often doesn't announce itself with a dramatic symptom or a trip to the emergency room. Instead, it can develop gradually, quietly affecting the way a person moves through everyday life.

[Syed Zaidi, MD](#), a family medicine provider with OSF HealthCare, sees chronic illness every day in his practice. He says changes in everyday functions can sometimes be early signs that something is happening with your health.

When something is no longer easy to do, such as the way you move, eat, sleep, even the way you urinate or move your bowels, those can be signs that something is changing, Dr. Zaidi says.

In medicine, the term "silent decline" refers to the gradual progression of a long-term health problem. The body can quietly worsen over months or years before noticeable warning signs appear. Examples can include high blood pressure, diabetes and even heart failure.

Chronic illness usually doesn't happen overnight. For example, it can take years for plaque to build up in your arteries. It can also take years for an enlarged prostate to begin significantly affecting a man's quality of life.

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Dr. Syed Zaidi (ZAY-DEE), a family practice provider at OSF HealthCare, says it's important to understand your health history and risk factors so you can prepare for potential chronic health problems.

Ask yourself some key questions: Am I a smoker? Do I drink alcohol? Am I sleeping or moving as well as I should? Once you start looking honestly at those questions, you can identify areas where you can make changes.

(((SOT)))

Dr. Syed Zaidi (ZAY-DEE), a family practice provider at OSF HealthCare

"You don't want to reverse 30 years in 30 days, right? So, you want to be able to be proactive as well. And I think when we talk about chronic disease, we also have to spend a lot of time talking about prevention as well." (:13)

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Chronic illness can worsen over time. That progression might happen in three months or over 10 years. It depends on the individual and the illness itself. According to Dr. Zaidi, one important factor is functionality — how well you're able to move through your daily life.

Talk to any health care provider, and they'll likely give you plenty of ways to take better care of yourself. One of the most important places to start is with sleep. Dr. Zaidi recommends aiming for about eight hours of good-quality sleep when possible. Other important steps include staying well hydrated, limiting ultra-processed food and cutting back on sugary drinks. Movement is another key component. That doesn't necessarily mean starting an intense exercise program. Begin with something manageable, such as a brisk 15-minute walk or simple chair exercises and go from there. But it all starts with finding a health care provider you feel comfortable with who can help guide your health journey.

We all know someone who has neglected their health for years. For those people, Dr. Zaidi has a simple message: It's never too late to make positive changes.