

“Even on the days that **I’m feeling OK**, I always have to consider that a **flare** could start next month, next week or this afternoon. I don’t know what my abilities will look like from day to day, and that **affects me even when I’m feeling good and my pain is low.**”

— *Jo Hjelle, 26, a student advising coordinator*

— STATISTICS

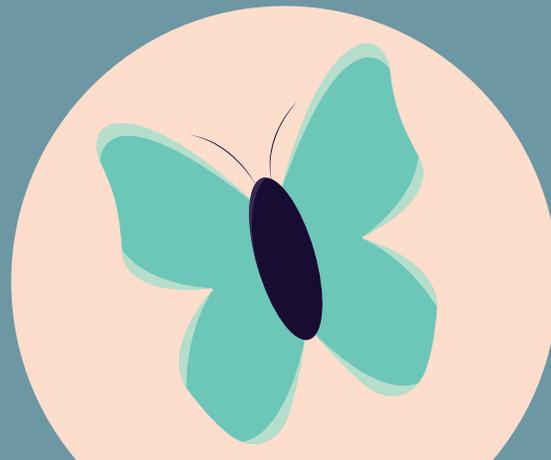
- US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2020, 157 million Americans will be afflicted with a chronic illness
- The US Census Bureau estimates that 96% of chronic illnesses are invisible
- 40% of the US adult population suffers from a chronic condition
- Autoimmune disease falls under the chronic illness umbrella and it is estimated that approximately 24-50 million (16%) of Americans have an autoimmune disease
- Autoimmune diseases impact females more than males with a 3:1 ratio

— CONTACT INFORMATION

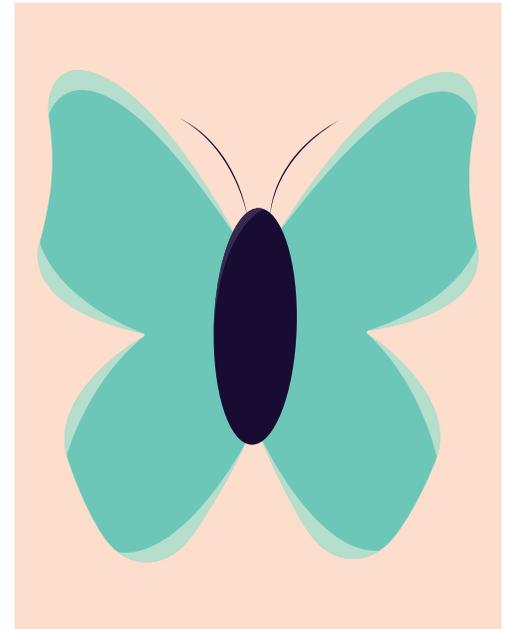
Facebook: @projectinvisiblelink

Instagram: @projectinvisiblelink

Email: projectinvisiblelink@gmail.com



INVISIBLE LINK



“Not every illness is visible”

By Mina Hryckowian

Designed By Erin McEwan

“You cannot see gravity,
but we are all subject to it.
**Invisible illnesses are
just as real as gravity.”**

— *Natasha Tracy*

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project Invisible Link was created with the intention of spreading awareness about invisible illnesses and their impact on members of our community.

WHAT DOES THE BUTTERFLY MEAN?

Butterflies symbolize endurance, transformation, the strength of the spirit, and hope.

WHAT IS AN INVISIBLE ILLNESS?

The term “invisible illness” can be hard to define, as there is no one accepted medical definition. However, it is usually used as an umbrella term for any medical condition that is not easily visible to others. Invisible illnesses range from chronic physical conditions to autoimmune disorders to mental illnesses.

STIGMA

“If you look fine, you are fine...”

Such an assumption leads to conclusions that

- You are not working enough to push through symptoms
- You are making up symptoms to avoid responsibilities
- Your symptoms are your fault

Stigma Does Real Damage

- Exacerbates symptoms
- Creates barriers to success
- Impacts one's identity and self-worth

Where does Stigma Occur?

Healthcare

- People with chronic pain = “drug seekers”
- Patient's physical symptoms are “all in their head”
- Multiple invisible illnesses = more difficult treatments

Education

- Students work more to compensate for their symptoms
- Faculty may be reluctant to follow or provide accommodations
- Lack of accommodations makes pursuing higher education daunting

Employment

- Difficult to receive accommodations

Relationships

- Symptoms can prevent people from engaging in social activities
- Can cause social isolation

“When I talk about **my visible illnesses**, people respond with **sympathy, fascination, and genuine concern**. When I talk about **my invisible conditions**, I'm met with **skepticism, doubt, and more judgment.**”

— *Megan McLaws, a 22-year-old social media manager who has both visible and invisible disabilities*

Because it's invisible, I sometimes will forget that I'm living with any illness until, **WHAM!** The chronic pain kicks in and I'm quickly reminded that I have special limitations. It's truly a mind flip from day to day.”

— *Tom R., living with Crohn's disease*

SOME INVISIBLE ILLNESSES

- fibromyalgia
- chronic fatigue syndrome
- rheumatoid arthritis
- lupus
- Crohn's disease
- small fiber neuropathy
- Diabetes
- Sjogren's syndrome
- multiple sclerosis
- Lyme disease
- chronic pain
- post-viral syndrome