

Living with Fibromyalgia and or Chronic Fatigue

By Alison Young, BCMA, ALTT, BSc, FIAT

Q. How do you deal with the uncertainty of how you are going to feel on a daily basis and function normally?

Q. Do you worry about your future? how you are going to work, and lead a 'normal life?'

Q. Do you long for the day when you will be free from Fibromyalgia or Fatigue?

When we suffer with chronic fibromyalgia/fatigue, sometimes just getting out of bed feels like a major achievement. After you have received a diagnosis from the doctor or Rheumatologist you feel happy that they have found out what you are suffering with, only to be told that there is no cure and on many occasions, just given a pamphlet and told to go and read it. The outlook appears gloomy, I am here to let you know, that there is a way that you can start to feel better!

The hardest aspect is to deal with the mental burden of what you have to face, this can initiate a pattern of stress, worry, anxiety and panic which can lead to depression. The key is to look for acceptance of your condition. I tried to ignore what was happening to me and kept trying to work as I used to without any changes to my work/home life balance which led to frustration and greater stress. My body reacted negatively to this situation making the Fibromyalgia and fatigue worse until the condition forced me to breaking point. At that point I had to make drastic decisions - gave up my job, stopped all activities and took to my bed which made the depression further deepen. I had to learn the hard way to make changes and get some quality of life back. The good news is that you can turn your life around enjoy the things you once did.

Once I stopped fighting and accepted what I had I was able to start my journey into recovery.

A question to ask yourself: is the condition having a chronic effect on your life? If you answer yes then I urge you to take some time out for yourself and become aware of what can make your symptoms worse. Are you finding it difficult to concentrate, is your brain in overdrive with a constant barrage of thoughts overtaking your mind. If you are at this point you are feeling pretty desperate and just want it to go away. Until you take some time out and accept what you have you will not be able to help improve the condition.

The most important realisation that I had is that stress had to be minimised, I cannot put enough emphasis on this and avoid the mind-set that keeps you focused on saying 'that if you had what I had you would be stressed', I did not realise that this type of thinking was feeding the Fibromyalgia. I can honestly say that it is only by coming through and out the other side that I truly see how debilitating stress is.

Most people experience stress at some point in their life and not all stress is bad, it's the bodies' way of preparing for the 'flight and fight response'. The stress that I am talking about is the pressure that we put on ourselves, 'our own expectations' if we have led a very active life the type of

questions are 'What if..., if only.....But..... this will feed our negativity which will only make situations worse. I know that if you suffer like I did it's a difficult thing to accept that stress can have such a huge impact on the physical body but honestly, accept that it can. There are plenty of scientific studies which outline how living and dealing with chronic pain and fatigue can cause chemical changes to the body that is why, when you have a condition that is a precursor to stress, the key is to take 'excess stress seriously' it will pay off so much in the long run.

Where do you start?

- One of the things that I did was to write down the expectations that I demand of myself and my body and study the expectations (a really good way of viewing this is put in your mind that a good friend or family member has this condition, would you expect the same expectations from them?). You may find that when you review the list you start to see how hard you are on yourself and the extra pressure you are creating. This realisation is priceless and if you can change your thought process the effect will be positive. It is a simple exercise but one that will pay dividends
- Start writing a daily pain diary and journal as soon as you can, so that you can track your progress, I can reassure you that the difference in my diary is significant and the improvement noticeable
- Choose a few positive affirmations and read these when awakening so that you can start the day from a positive mind-set
- Make sure you reward yourself regularly for tasks well done, we can be our own worst enemy about placing value on the things that we achieve, we tend to look for the major achievements rather than congratulating ourselves for daily things that we do
- If you feel tired, rest as soon as you can even 10 minutes at a time can provide you with a little more energy and focus
- Do not suffer alone, make sure that you have someone you can talk to on a regular basis sharing how you feel and not holding emotions in is a must! Crying, talking, laughing can release so much stress and also help with muscle tension

I urge you to make the above changes today, take control and you will feel better. The next article will look at ways to minimise the pain and discomfort and why strengthening the muscles is so important.

I hope you find this helpful for those who have these conditions or for friends or family who see their loved ones struggle with Fibromyalgia and or chronic fatigue.