Coping With Fibromyalgia Stiffness in the Morning

by STARLA RICH

The Daily Struggle of Fibromyalgia Stiffness

It is another day when my schedule demands my feet hit the ground running, but even walking is a chore. I know I am not alone because 90 percent of those suffering from fibromyalgia experience frequent and chronic morning pain and stiffness.

Fibromyalgia morning stiffness is exacerbated by pain, fatigue and sleep disturbances, and is among the top complaints of fibro sufferers. Although doctors tend to list it as a minor symptom, those of us who deal with it on a regular basis understand that it is anything but minor and in fact is often debilitating.

With fibromyalgia morning stiffness and pain, simple daily tasks are daunting — from walking across the floor or stepping into a shower, to grasping a toothbrush or water glass, to putting on a pair of slacks or bending down to lace up your sneakers.

For me, it takes as long as three hours to simply develop a normal pace for my day.

Confusion has been the experience of countless sufferers of fibromyalgia. If doctors can’t fully explain the whys of the symptoms associated with fibromyalgia, then it becomes more difficult to determine methods of coping or discovering ways to ease the morning stiffness, pain and many other symptoms that come with being diagnosed with fibro.

Coping With and Easing Morning Stiffness and Pain

As a sufferer of fibromyalgia for almost 15 years, I know all too well that some days are better than others, but I honestly can’t recall a day in recent months or even years that I did not wake up with some level of morning stiffness and pain.

Times of flare-ups produce more difficulties in the morning. A fitful night of poor sleep exacerbates the problem upon rising for the day. A stormy weather day "settles in my bones" as my grandmother would say.

But there are methods of coping and there is hope. Below are some techniques I hope you will try if you have not already. No one method is a cure-all, and what works varies from person to person, but over time you will find what works better for you.

Listen to your body. Pay attention to your diet, your surroundings, your emotional triggers and stresses so that you can better learn how to best take care of YOU!

Morning stiffness does not start in the morning! It is usually a result of conditions from the previous night. There are things you can do to pave a path for a better morning:

Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol and Nicotine

Thinking about a nightcap, a smoke or a cup of coffee before bed? Think again. Caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can disrupt restful sleep, which can make pain and morning stiffness even worse the morning after.

Practice Healthy Sleep Habits

Getting a good night’s sleep might be the most important step in minimizing morning pain and stiffness for fibromyalgia patients. Some tips to consider in achieving longer and better sleep include not watching TV or doing work in the bedroom at night.

Also, be sure to keep your bedroom temperature at a comfortable level — a room that's too cold will increase stiffness, and one that's too warm can cause muscle aches and increased pain.

Another tip to better sleep at night starts during your day. If you establish an exercise routine during the day, it will increase restful sleep at night. Finally, most experts agree that it is important not to sleep during the day no matter how fatigued you might feel as it robs you sleep at night.

Keep a Regular Schedule

Whether you have fibromyalgia or not, experts recommend setting a sleep schedule and trying to stick to it as much as possible. This is a good rule of thumb, however those who suffer from fibromyalgia know this is not always possible due to frequent sleep disruption. Continue to pay attention to your body and learn more about what works best for you.

Take a Warm Shower or Bath

One of the quickest and easiest things you can do to lessen morning pain and stiffness from fibromyalgia is harness the healing power of water. Warm water in the morning will help to relax your muscles and provide relief. It is important to stay in the warm water for at least 10 minutes.

If you do an Epsom salt bath, it is recommended to use 1 lb. of Epsom salt and 1 lb. of baking soda to a tub of hot water. Baking soda assists in releasing energy and toxins from the skin so that magnesium is better absorbed.

Try a Morning Self Massage

Gently rubbing your own shoulders, neck, arms, back, legs and feet first thing in the morning before you get out of bed might help loosen your muscles and make you feel more limber, easing morning stiffness and pain.

Of course if you have a built-in masseuse, such as a companion or family member, this is even better!

Keep Going

Finally, the best advice I can give is to not give up or give in, but keep going. It becomes easy to push aside activity due morning stiffness and pain. However, sitting still and not pushing through is the worst thing you can do. It is like allowing your car to sit in the driveway for days on end without cranking up the engine. Before you know it, the battery is dead.

You don’t have to take a road trip each day, but start your engine just in case you need to. Being gentle and kind to yourself are two different things; by all means be gentle on those days when you can’t seem to get moving or the pain is severe, but be kind by understanding that giving in to those conditions is ultimately to your detriment.

Keep moving — even at a tortoise’s pace you’ll get there!