Managing the Link Between Fibromyalgia and Stress

by ERIC PATTERSON

Managing Stress and Its Impact on Your Fibro

Fibromyalgia warrior Sarah Borien and counselor Eric Patterson share their tips for combatting stress.

Sarah's Tips for Managing Stress

Often when fibromyalgia patients are told about the need to control stress levels, we get annoyed. It implies that if stress affects our pain then our pain isn't 'real'; it implies the pain is more psychological than it is physical and that can be frustrating.

However, stress has a direct impact on our pain levels so it's essential that we try and keep our lives as stress-free as possible. Many people internalize their stress which means that the more stressed we become, the more pressure we put on our insides.

How can we ease the stress in our lives?

1. Identify the Stresses

You can't reduce them until you identify them. Make a list of all the things that cause you some kind of stress, and prepare yourself because it's going to be long!

Once you have your list, cross through everything that you have no control over. This is important because although you can't control everything, you can probably change more than you think.

2. Implement Change

It's one thing to identify the stress, but another to make practical changes. Of all the things you have control over, write down something you can do to make it easier.

For example, my journey to work is stressful so I have changed my working hours to travel outside of rush hour to reduce my stress.

3. Help Yourself

I can't be the only one who makes life harder for myself. We all do that, right? Right?! For example, being late makes me stressed, but I am also a person who doesn't check my travel plans before I leave the house. Therefore traffic jams or train cancellations make me incredibly stressed, and yet I could have made my life much easier by checking travel in advance.

Next page: additional tips for managing stress.

Sarah's Tips for Managing Stress

4. Avoid People Who Cause You Stress

Not everyone in our life is a blessing. If I sit and think about the people in my life, there are a couple that I realize haven't brought me any form of joy in a long time. In fact, seeing them causes me stress… maintaining a forced friendship causes me stress… therefore, it is common sense that I remove them from my life.

5. Find a Go-To Stress Reliever

It's important to know how to relax when you find yourself in a stressful situation, as removing tension build-up is essential. While things like massages are good at relieving stress, waiting a week for an appointment doesn't provide you with the relaxation you may need.

Some recommendations include:

- Fresh air and deep breathing (an obvious but always helpful action),
- Practice short bursts of meditation that can provide an instant sense of calm,
- Take a break and physically remove yourself from a situation – the English in me suggests an action like making a cup of tea to create a 'time-out'
- Find a website or blog that centers you and relaxes you – perhaps a photography blog or a comedy blog to provide you with distraction and happiness.

Counselor Eric's Tips for Managing Stress

You cannot stop fibromyalgia. You cannot stop stress. But you can develop good stress-busting copings skills to make the fight fair. Here's how:

1. Understand Your Stress

Just as fibro symptoms are unique to each sufferer, so are stressors. Your triggers will differ from other people, as will the intensity and duration of symptoms following the trigger.

If you can understand your stress, you will be better able to lessen its effects. The goal is to add the best coping skills at the best times so that you feel more balanced.

As long as balance is in place, you will perceive your symptoms as more manageable.

Next page: more tips from Eric.

Counselor Eric's Tips for Managing Stress

2. Change Your Environment

This is an easy and somewhat overlooked stress-buster. Shift your focus from stressors to supports and list favorable smells, sights, sounds, tastes and touches to explore when stress is high.

You may not be able to change the pain but putting on your favorite funny movie can transport you to a more desirable place. Turn down the lights, light a scented candle, put on your coziest pair of pajamas and play your favorite song to relieve stress through distraction and the addition of positives.

3. Change Your Mind

Stress leaves your mind a jumbled ball of confusion. You are prone to think more negatively and see people in skewed ways. When stress is high, perceptions will be less accurate. Realizing this is extremely important.

Relaxations can calm your mind and body simultaneously by releasing desired hormones and neurotransmitters. Cognitive restructuring and radical acceptance seek out new ways to view the world and discover a level of peace in your own skin. A therapist can assist in understanding these interventions.

4. Change Your Community

Your community is the group of people in your life including professional, personal and online contacts. Find time to engage in positive experiences and find value in the healing power of touch. Studies show that hugs, kisses and sex are solid stress-busters, while isolation breeds stress. Online and in-person support groups are widely available for those looking for change.

Conclusion

You cannot change the unchangeable. Fibro, and the stress that accompanies it, is a part of your life. Stop the resentment and start working to add the positives above. With persistence, you can find balance that leads to opportunity. Stay optimistic to achieve.