Is Fibromyalgia Progressive?

by SARAH BORIEN

Why Does it Seem Like Fibro Gets Worse Over Time?

Is fibromyalgia progressive? The medical profession doesn't class it as a progressive or degenerative condition, but with long and frequent flare ups recurring over and over again it's no wonder many of us feel like things are getting worse over time.

Although your body may not technically be deteriorating, it can feel like your quality of life is getting progressively worse. You can't do the things you used to and the irregularity of the condition prevents you from finding the routine and consistency you crave.

In fact, with symptoms changing day to day, it's almost like having to come terms with your limitations all over again.

It's not all doom and gloom though. Here are five things you can do to delay the flare-ups and limit that feeling of degeneration.

1. Keep Track of Your Flares

It's important that you really get to know your body and how it reacts because every fibromyalgia patient experiences something different. It's tempting to put your faith in the medical community then sit back and watch, but those of you who have suffered for many years know your doctor can only help you so much and after that it's down to you – a thought I find both empowering and frustrating.

Start recording your activity in a diary and make sure you make a note of your flare ups. This can be tedious but you'll start to notice patterns you hadn't been aware of that can help you predict (and sometimes even avoid) your flare ups.

2. Pace Yourself

You know it's important to keep active but it's equally important not to push yourself, and this careful balance is tricky business.

Fibromyalgia patients have a tendency to squeeze as much as possible in to a 'good day', only to find that flare ups became more frequent or more intense. You push yourself until you crash and eventually your 'good days' really aren't as good as they used to be.

Take your time, slow down and find a consistent level of activity that won't throw your body into fits and flares. What this means for each of you will vary depending on your body but here are some suggestions:

- Look at how often you're active each month and halve it. I realized I was busy every weekend and never

had chance to rest, so I now keep two weekends free every month. The more exhausted you are the less equipped you are to cope with the pain, so be strict with yourself; don't give in and agree to do something on one of those rest days.
- Substitute activities that stretch or frustrate you for those that are easier on your body and therefore easier on your mind, such as changing to a softer form of exercise or meeting friends at a location that's easier for you.

Next page: three more tips for limiting the feeling of degeneration.

3. Try New Things

Fibromyalgia is a relatively new condition and there is always some new online advert for "breakthrough pain relief" or "fibromyalgia cure" to be tempted to try. It's easy to get caught up in the hysteria of "I ate raw potatoes ten times a day and my fibromyalgia vanished" and it's equally easy to become frustrated and cynical about the suggestions you stumble across online. Again, it's all about finding that magical balance.

Be systematic in your approach so that you can really see whether or not something has made a difference – change one thing at a time and (back to point one) keep track of your flares. My recent discoveries have included reducing the amount of gluten I eat and rubbing Pernaton gel into sore areas, both of which seem to have made a positive impact.

Still, what works for one might not work for another so when you feel inclined, start introducing something new to your world – or taking something out. These things are unlikely to treat the cause but if they treat the symptoms, well, that's a start.

4. Follow your Head

It is absolutely essential that you make the time to look after your mind as much as your body. Often people think fibromyalgia is a progressive condition because they *feel* like things are getting worse.

This emotional response, coupled with fatigue and frustration tend to lead to anger, anxiety and depression amongst other things. From there it's just one small step to feeling like your life is getting worse over time.

It's important to acknowledge the emotional side of fibromyalgia as well as the physical and work on coping strategies for your mental health. Make sure you do the simple things that bring you joy such as ordering in from your favourite pizza place, binge-watching the latest Netflix series or taking a long bath with candles and music. (There's a little insight into my life for you!)

Whatever gets you to that happy place, indulge in it. And if the struggle runs deeper than that, seek psychological support to help you along the way. Whatever you do, don't ignore your head.

5. Get a Good Support Network

There's some truth in that good old adage "a problem shared is a problem halved." Talk won't take away your condition, but it will help ease the pain.

It's very easy to seek a support network and instead find yourself caught up in a pity party. The two are very different and the latter isn't very helpful. You need to make sure you have a person – or people – in your life who can help you through some of the more difficult times and, when you have that, you need to factor in some fun.

You could have a film night with your closest girlfriends or watch stand-up comedy, or even use those virtual friendships you've made in online communities to talk about your latest struggles. Whatever you do, do it in a

way that makes you giggle. Laughter is the best medicine – another cliché I happen to love.