Tips for Coping With Fibromyalgia Anger and Frustrations

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The Connection Between Fibromyalgia and Anger

Anger is a very common emotion, particularly for people who have fibromyalgia. It is a natural, human reaction and yet it doesn't get an awful lot of attention as a side effect to chronic pain.

It's one thing to accept our anger, but it's another to let that anger consume us and let it impact on our lives and the lives of others. It can be difficult to draw that line when you feel enraged by what you have lost and what has emerged in its place; you've been given a life that you didn't plan and wouldn't choose.

But, there are things you can do to keep your anger at bay and prevent in encroaching on your life.

Ranting vs. Anger

A friend of mine once told me I was the angriest person he knew. It became a bit of a running joke – we would meet up for drinks, and before long I was ranting, and he was mocking my anger. It was just the way it was.

A year later I was talking to a psychiatrist after yet another unsuccessful referral following a fibro flare-up, and I told him about my anger. He asked me to give him some examples of what made me angry.

As I went through the list, he quietly listened, then asked: "What makes you think this is anger? You sound like an intelligent girl who's ranting about the things that are important to her. What's wrong with that?"

I suddenly felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I wasn't weird and angry, and I was normal and healthy. I'm sharing this story because there is a big difference between feeling angry and being an angry person. Don't let the label consume you; recognize that you're allowed a good rant from time to time. It's necessary.

Understand Why You're Angry and Frustrated

This might seem quite simple at first, but I think it's important to get a good understanding of what makes you angry in the first place so that you can look at ways to control or avoid it in the future.

I'm not a doctor, but experience has taught me that there are often small triggers that can cause you to feel more angry than usual, and identifying these triggers can be a key step to overcoming the negative emotion.

You can start by making notes or lists whenever you feel your anger developing, which will help you find patterns in your behavior. For example, you might think your anger stems from something broad, like having fibromyalgia, but as you start to take notes, you will begin to see the smaller triggers.

Perhaps it's the patronizing way your partner talks to you when what you need are strength and support, or

maybe it’s the fact telemarketers call you three times a day, and you just can’t cope with another phone call. These small occurrences are part of a bigger issue, but they’re still a valid contributor to the anger you feel.

Making Changes and Identifying Your Triggers

I’m a firm believer that if you don’t like something the way it is, you should make a change. Obviously, this has restrictions; I don’t like the fact I have fibromyalgia, but I can’t change it. However, what I can change is the way I think about it and the way I choose to cope with it.

Having made notes and identified the things that trigger your anger, it’s time to start finding ways to address and avoid it. Taking the examples from above, if your partner’s behavior is causing your anger, then you should tell them how you prefer to feel supported.

Taking control over your triggers can be a way of reducing the amount of anger you feel or the frequency with which you feel it.

Just Breathe In and Find Your Inner Calm

As a person who is prone to ranting and raving, I don’t find it easy to connect to my inner calm. However, I know that it’s an essential coping strategy for fibromyalgia patients because it doesn’t just ease anger; it eases anxiety and depression and often reduces the frequency of flare-ups too.

The trick here is to make sure you find YOUR inner calm, not the calm that works for someone else. Annoyingly, this takes time, and it means you have to put in some work, but it’s worth it. I spent a long time thinking that my inner calm could be found at the back of a meditation class or in the depths of a yoga retreat.

After three yoga classes and two attempts at meditation, I realized they were frustratingly slow and made me angry. Oh, the irony! I am sarcastic and impatient so meditation – try as I might – was just not for me. Some find their calm in a bath with relaxing candles, but I’m more a shower girl, so that didn’t work for me either.

It takes time to work out where to find your inner calm, but it’s a journey well worth taking because when you start to recognize the signs of anger, you need to know there is somewhere you can go.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

This is yet another common coping strategy for people living with fibromyalgia in general, but it’s really important when it comes to managing your anger.

Often, when we get angry, we shout and become aggressive and intimidating. People stop listening to the words and just see the rage, so you need to make sure that you explain what makes you angry and what you’re doing to overcome it. This could be as easy as talking to your family, but if you struggle to control your emotions, then it may be helpful for you to seek professional help.

This could mean talking to your doctor or attending anger management classes, but there are also a number of mental health support groups and online forums that might give you the outlet you need to talk about your anger.

The important thing is to address your anger. Don’t push it away; the rage monster will lurk in the background and come back twice as angry.