Enjoying Big Events Despite Fibromyalgia

by SARAH BORIEN

Surviving – and Enjoying – Important Events With Fibromyalgia

I've suffered from fibromyalgia for six years and I like to think I'm pretty positive about coping with the condition. I mean, I hate it – obviously – but I recognize the need to understand my new body and find coping strategies that work for me and my life.

The only time it really gets me down is when there is an important event, like a wedding or birthday party, and I know I won't be able to enjoy it in the way I once could. That can be a pretty depressing thought.

This year most of my friends are turning 30 and six of them are getting married. That's a lot of celebrating. So, how do we cope?

Respect Your Condition

Firstly, it's at times like this that I remind myself I have a disability. Fibromyalgia is not a condition to take lightly, especially not when you're going to be on your feet all day and all night. You have to respect it and prepare for what will, undoubtedly, be a very difficult day.

You might not last all day or all night, and you may just have to accept that, but approach the day with care and above all else, prepare. Make sure you're as ready for it as you can be.

Don't Panic

I've got two bachelorette parties and two weddings in May, and I'm maid of honour at one of the weddings, which falls on the last weekend of May. I'm not going to lie… I'm scared. Really scared. I've almost convinced myself that by the time the last wedding comes around I will be a broken woman and I won't be able to follow my bride up the aisle, never mind dance at the reception.

Then I take a deep breath and tell myself not to panic. I will do all I can to prepare for the month, and I will cope as best I know how. It is what it is, and there are practical ways to cope, so I remind myself to focus on those rather than adding stress and anxiety to an already challenging month.

Build in Rest Time

If you know you've got a big occasion coming up, make sure you build in proper time to rest. I've taken a week off work in June because I know I will need to recover from my hectic May, and I've made sure my April is pretty empty so that I'm not busy in the lead up.

Unfortunately, we can't save up our energy to use at a later date, but you don't want to be exhausted before you start, so stay as rested as you can.

Next page: four more tips for enjoying events with fibromyalgia.

Talk to People

Our friends and family would be horrified if they discovered their celebrations were causing us stress and pain. Deep down, we know that all they want is for us to be with them on their special day and share in their happiness.

They don't care whether or not we can stand for the day, or dance all night, or party into the early hours. They will just be grateful that we made the effort.

However, it's important that people at the event know about your condition and know how to help you. I'm not suggesting you trouble the bride and groom with tales of your chronic pain moments before their big day, but make sure there are people on the day who can spring in to action to support you if necessary.

Make a Plan

Unfortunately, fibromyalgia means we can't be as spontaneous as we used to be. We need to forward plan and we need to think about how we can protect ourselves on a busy day.

Have you planned your travel? Do you know where you're staying? How can you get home if you need to leave early? Perhaps you can stay at the venue and sneak up to your room for frequent rests. It's important that you have a plan and know how to use it.

Take Supplies

No one wants to go to a wedding or birthday with a big bag full of medical equipment. For a start, it rarely matches the outfit! But there are things that you could – and should – think about taking with you.

Medication is a must, as is anything else that gives you instant relief. Think about the things that you suffer most with and how you can fight them; for example, sitting on church benches or pub seating often causes me pain, so I'll be taking a big scarf that doubles up as a seat cushion!

Make a Choice

There comes a point where we need to make a choice about what we *want* to do vs what we *should* do. I like to think I'm pretty sensible about my fibromyalgia most of the time, but I also know that when I am a bridesmaid at my best friend's wedding I'm going to do all I can to be part of the party!

There are times when we should decline the invitation and stay home to rest, there are other times when we should celebrate for an hour then sneak off early, and then there are the times when we should go armed with painkillers and throw ourselves into a flare-up.

It's definitely not sensible, but I am of the opinion that sometimes, it's necessary. Every now and again an event will come along where you make the choice to accept a flare-up and celebrate with your very best friends.