Pushing Yourself With Fibromyalgia

by SARAH BORIEN

Finding Balance: Pushing Yourself, but Not Too Hard

I was 24-years-old when I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia. I was energetic and impatient, I worked hard and I played hard. I worked full-time, went out in the evenings, traveled up and down the country at weekends and lived the life of a ‘normal’ 24-year-old.

After I became unwell I knew my body couldn’t cope with my lifestyle and things would have to change, but apparently my mind didn’t get the memo. I was constantly frustrated and upset I couldn’t do the things I wanted to, and I got myself into a routine that many fibro patients will be familiar with. I would push through the pain until I was in agony, which would trigger a flare-up, then I’d crash and rest, recover and do it all again.

Not all fibro patients respond in this way; some go to the other extreme and stop pushing themselves at all. They spend more time at home, stop socializing with friends, and start to give up the fight. They may feel if every activity is going to cause more pain, they may as well stop trying.

No matter how you responded, I’m almost positive you have struggled to cope with your diagnosis at one time or another. Neither becoming a hermit nor trying to be an all-out socialite is the best way to cope, so what’s the answer?

It’s that all-important word: balance. Here are four ways to make sure you push yourself — but not too hard.

1. Step Back and Re-Evaluate

There’s no doubt about it, when you are diagnosed with fibromyalgia your life is going to change. It’s important to step back and think about what’s important to you. You can’t do it all, but that doesn’t mean you should do nothing.

Think about what you want to save your energy for, be it work or childcare or socializing, and then decide what you are going to give up. It’s a difficult process to go through, but it’s a good way of learning to accept the changes.

2. Create Structure

When you’re feeling practical and clear-headed, it’s time to create a new structure that allows you to cope with the new you. For me, my priority was working full time and therefore I had to compromise on the way I spent my spare time. I had to rest more, travel less, and change the way I socialized.

I got my diary out and built in one free weekend every month and one ‘at home’ weekend. I’m really strict with myself and make sure I always have some structured down time in my diary.

3. Fibromyalgia Future Planning

Your future may have changed, but it's not over. It's important to think about what you want from your future and how you can achieve it, because it's likely that your path has changed.

For example, I always wanted to work for myself. I have now decided that I can't afford to take that risk because I won't be able to pay my mortgage if I have to take time off. I still want to do the same work, but now I am looking for a company that has good employee benefits and a commitment to workplace wellbeing.

The path is different but the end goal is the same: having a career I love.

4. Find Your Cheerleaders

If you can stop yourself overdoing it when you're pushing too hard, or if you can drag yourself out of bed when you're not pushing hard enough, then you're a better person than I am.

We all know what we should do, but that doesn't mean we do it. A consultant once said to me, "You're your own worst enemy. Your body wants to rest and your mind won't let it."

So true! Because of that, I now have key supporters in my friends and family. They're the people that know what I can and can't cope with, and they're the champions for my health when I'm misbehaving. You need people to encourage you and cheer you on because you can't do this alone.