The Benefits of Distraction for Pain Management

by STARLA RICH

Distract Yourself From the Pain

When you're struggling to focus on a particular task, a distraction may seem disruptive — like on those days when fibro fog is at its height and focusing on the simplest of things seems next to impossible. However, some distractions can be a blessing, especially when you are dealing with chronic pain. Planned distractions can actually serve as welcomed deterrents to pain.

This past weekend became a distraction for which I was most grateful.

A couple of weeks ago, I began making plans to attend a family reunion six hours from my home. I was cautiously optimistic because it had been a number of years since I had traveled such a long distance over an extended number of days.

Prior to the trip, I reconnected with an old college friend who I had not seen in 33 years. We took nightly trips down memory lane talking about our “school days.” Within a couple of days I realized that I was waking with minimal pain and stiffness, and within a couple more nights, I realized that I was sleeping much more soundly.

Once the weekend arrived for the trip, I had energy that carried me through what could’ve been one of the worst excursions imaginable, as our trip took over eight hours in adverse weather conditions, heavy rain and traffic congested detours. Even packed in our car like a sardine, I had energy to laugh, sing, and enjoy the scenery along the route to our destination.

The change of scenery, the love of family and the memories shared with friends proved to be distractions of immeasurable value.

Pain Is Subjective

Chronic pain can provoke emotional reactions, such as fear or even terror, depending on what we believe about the pain signals. When I first began planning my trip, I felt a measure of anxiety due to my chronic pain.

Pain can be perceived as crippling or simply just a deterrent, depending on our perception. Consider pain associated with sports or other engaging and rewarding activities. Pain is merely a feeling to be overcome in order to be able to continue in the activity.

How we feel about our pain and what we do to manage it is paramount. My personal perception changed significantly as I began to learn the art of implementing distractions as a method of pain management.

The Value of Distractions

Immersing yourself in pleasant thoughts and activities can lessen pain by providing distraction. Imagery can be

especially helpful, as you visualize a pleasant scene, involving as many senses as possible. Both thoughts and activities proved to be beneficial for me as I reminisced over past memories and participated in family activities that created new ones.

There are activities right at your fingertips that bring pleasure and can also provide distraction from pain. Examples include reading a book, watching a movie, taking a bath, listening to or playing music and spending time in nature in your own backyard.

One of my favorite diversions is spending time on my back screened sun porch. The sounds of birds chirping and squirrels in the trees are like physical therapy. The feel of the breeze blowing through the porch as I look out at an array of greens, pinks, yellows and purples is often more effective than pain medicine.

I have much gratitude for my personal sanctuary that is like an oasis every time I step onto my porch. You can create something in nature that will serve as a positive distraction as well. Perhaps install bird feeders, hang hummingbird perches, plant a flower garden or purchase a few hanging plants.

Off the Beaten Path

Most will agree that we live in a virtual world much more so than we did a decade ago. With the advancement of technology, the ability to experience places and activities via a computer screen has literally opened up a whole new world.

Researchers have explored the benefits of virtual reality (VR) as a distraction from pain. The rationale for the use of VR-based distraction for acute pain is that because pain requires conscious attention, VR draws attention into the computer-generated world, leaving less attention available to process incoming pain signals.

For those who have children or teens who spend time immersed in video games, this may be the perfect environment for you to find a way to spend quality time with your children as well as manage your pain rather than allowing the pain rob you of that time with those you love.

Make Time for Yourself Each Day

If I could emphasize the most important thing in pain management for those of use dealing with fibromyalgia, it would be this — make time for YOU each and every day! Balance is the key and it is imperative that you work for an overall lifestyle balance. Make time to do the things you "want" to do as well as the things you "have" to do.

People with fibromyalgia are faced with special demands that other healthy people do not have. The task of coping with pain and fatigue each day makes it necessary to keep your priorities in order so you have the energy to reach your daily goals as well as enjoying a better quality of life.

Become your biggest priority! Be kind, be patient and take care of you so that others can benefit from the value you bring to their lives.