Fibromyalgia and Suicide Risk

by ERIC PATTERSON

Understanding Why Fibro and Thoughts of Suicide Are Linked

Suicide is a concerning issue, and one that deserves a better level of understanding. With increased understanding, there comes a chance for increased prevention through effective treatment and available interventions. By identifying factors that contribute to suicidal thoughts and actions, people that are more prone to suicide can be recognized and seek the help they deserve.

Studies find commonalities in people that are more prone to suicide attempts and completed suicides. The list of characteristics includes:

- Being a woman. Men complete suicide four times more, but women are three times more likely to attempt suicide.
- Chronic pain — regardless of the source.
- Poor psychological health marked by high levels of depression and anxiety or low self-esteem.
- Poor sleep, which includes trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep, poor sleep continuity, and poor quality of sleep.

If you look at these four characteristics, an association should become clear between factors that lead to suicide and symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Women are more likely than men to have the disease. The primary symptom of fibro is chronic, widespread pain. Often, fibro is associated with mental health issues with about 40 percent of people diagnosed with fibro also having depression. Lastly, many people with fibro report issues with increased fatigue and reduced quality and quantity of sleep related to the disease.

People with fibromyalgia are more likely to have suicidal ideation, which means they think that suicide seems like a good solution to the problem of their symptoms, and they are more likely to have suicide attempts then the typical person.

Even more interesting is the idea that people with fibro will have more thoughts and attempts of suicide than other groups with chronic pain. The multiple layers and dimensions of fibro lead to a more negative impact that chronic pain alone.

With all of this evidence, you are left with important questions. What are you going to do to avoid this situation? What are you going to do to defy the odds and flourish with fibro while others wilt under the pressure?

If you read other information, people will tell you to start an exercise routine, improve your sleep hygiene, watch what you eat, and utilize measures to improve your self-esteem. All of these aspects are valuable, but you have heard them all before.

The plans that encourage walking four days per week sound great — if only you could have less pain. The

inspiration to eat healthy meals makes a lot of sense — if only you had the energy to stand in front of the stove. Of course, you would like to get good sleep, everyone would, but that option seems like an impossibility at this point. Right now, everything seems out of reach.

Fight Fibro With Optimism

If you find yourself in this situation, the problem is not pain, diet, exercise, energy or sleep separately. The problem is the cumulative effect that becomes bigger than any of the individual problems alone. The problem is pessimism. Pessimism can be described in many ways including:

- Seeing the glass as half-empty rather than half-full.
- Seeing life as a never-ending journey of disappointment.
- Focusing on how other people have things better or easy than you.
- An inability to find positive aspects about the people, places or things around you.

Next page: how to be realistic, patient and kind about your condition

Fight Fibro With Optimism

In many ways, pessimism is a logical response to fibro. Fibro is a chronic medical condition. It cannot be cured. It cannot be eliminated. It can only be treated with varying levels of response. When you look at your future with fibro, it looks bleak.

This is the problem. More so than the factors contributing, the overall life outlook will be your greatest enemy. This foe has been gathering momentum since your diagnosis.

What was once a small pebble of fibro has been adding mass and building speed over the weeks, months and years. Now, it is a powerful force that seems invincible. This is how fibro wins. It convinces you that it is too massive and frightening to be beaten, so you don't even attempt to face it.

This enemy must be challenged, though. Otherwise, the result is the suicidal ideation and attempts described earlier. To combat this foe, you must fight back with an approach that is focused on slowing the momentum, stopping the force, and beginning to build motion in your direction. Rather than small, specific tasks, this challenge requires broad changes. Want to fight your fibro? Here's how:

Be Realistic

Are you going to wake up one day pain-free? No. Are you going to get great sleep every night? No. Are you going to have zero mental health concerns? No.

Fibro will cause problems in your life. You can take measures to physically change these aspects, but a better use of your time is to change your perceptions and expectations of these. The negatives in your life do not cause distress. It is the disparity between expectations and reality that create distress. By being more realistic with your expectations, you will have less pessimism.

Be Patient

Some people choose to battle fibro with all-out effort to quickly undo the damaging effects of the disease. While this approach may work for some, you would do better to address this as a marathon, not a sprint.

By viewing the disease as something that will take a concerted effort over many years to combat you limit your frustrations by building patience. Your symptoms will not change immediately, but if you can work to build your optimism, you can reach your goal eventually.

Be Kind

Usually people will preach the virtues of kindness towards others, but this is regarding the kindness towards yourself. Fibro will work to turn you against yourself. By being kind to yourself, you fight back against fibro.

This can be accomplished by praising your accomplishments and being understanding of your shortcomings. If you lose faith and belief in yourself, pessimism takes hold.

Fibro is a powerful foe. The direct results of pain, mental health issues, fatigue and poor sleep are tough enough to manage. When you add the indirect results that end with suicidal ideation, attempts, and completed suicides, the disease becomes more ominous.

The battle worth fighting is over optimism. If fibro steals this quality from you, your situation will be painful. If you still have your hope, hold on to it. If fibro has corrupted it, strive to recover it. If you can keep hope alive, it can keep you alive.