The Impact of Chronic Pain

by BARBARA LEECH

How Chronic Pain Changes Your Outlook

I have friends and family who believe always being positive is what keeps bad things from coming into your life. Apparently everyone is a magnet, including me.

With fibromyalgia causing me variable measures of pain every day, they do not understand it is nearly impossible for me to remain positive. They point an accusing finger and say my outlook on life is very negative and that is why I am not getting better. They say that is why I have fibromyalgia.

First I ask, “Who says that to someone?” Do they point judgmental fingers at people with cancer?

Next, I understand having a positive outlook is indeed helpful in perseverance and how you go about your life, but that does not mean you are supposed to be fake when every day you are wondering how you will make it through. It is easy for them to have a positive outlook because they are healthy, and seemingly, nothing bad ever seems to happen to them.

I do try to have a positive outlook too, really I do. I appreciate the good days when I wake up and for some unknown reason, or my combination of medication and self-care actually come together perfectly, I am thankful and hopeful for having a less-challenging day. I achieve a positive attitude, but sadly, it is quickly dashed when I wake up the next day and it is all I can do to get out of bed without tears falling.

Faced with this constant rollercoaster of uncertainty and debilitating pain most of the time, it becomes harder and harder to even pretend my outlook on life is positive, never mind feel it 24/7.

Confession: My Outlook Is Painful

So, that is my confession. My outlook has changed because of fibromyalgia and I don’t think being fake will solve the problem. Pain wears on you and that place deep inside of you; perhaps your soul.

You become weary from the daily struggles and keeping up with expectations from your job, friends, and family. Happy occasions and celebrations become one more thing you must get through or manage.

Spontaneity vanishes as you must plan ahead for everything in order to get through it. Life’s joy can be found in many of those spontaneous moments, and with fibromyalgia, your life is robbed of those moments.

Think about it. With fibromyalgia, I can no longer just take the kids on a surprise adventure, like going to the park and then out to our favorite bakery. Sounds so simple and enjoyable, doesn’t it?

But, I have to plan it on a day when I wake up and the pain level is in check, so I think I can handle all that is required; a lot walking and playing. Other people take the ability to do all of that, with no planning it out and

weighing their health that morning, completely for granted. I no longer have that luxury.

Why I Anticipate the Negative — Even When I Want to Be Positive

I also know that what I do on a good day will probably come back to bite me the next. I will hurt badly the next day and maybe be so exhausted I will struggle to get through my day. It will be a day that makes me regret my time of joy.

Next page: how to overcome negativity and change your outlook.

Why I Anticipate the Negative — Even When I Want to Be Positive

Essentially, I am punished for enjoying the good days. How can you truly let the good day into your heart, affect your outlook on life in a positive way, when you know it will actually bring about a horrible painful day that follows?

Punishment brings about an associated response. It does in children and it does in those with fibromyalgia. If you pay with pain and suffering following any time you are joyful and playful (and dare I say happy?) eventually you come to anticipate the negative before it even arrives.

Relationship Changes That Hit You Hard

Many of my hardest fibromyalgia moments are based upon what this disease has stolen from me, how I view myself, and how others treat me. I have learned many things about the true nature of people who love me, and in some cases that has not been easy.

I have had people distance themselves from me. Budding friendships and invites to the beach have been replaced with me wanting that connection back and being angry my illness makes people too uncomfortable to include me.

Thankfully I can find the opposite kind of treatment with my husband and children, who have surprised me with the love and support they continue to offer me. They have patience for when I am struggling and gratitude for the days where I can be more of who I want to be.

Thankfully, some people do surprise you in a good way, but the disappointment in most people and how they have reacted is one of the hardest things to deal with.

Self-Esteem and the Future With Fibro

Some of my hardest moments that affected my outlook on life include having to reinvent my career, which of course stole much of my self-esteem. I telecommute now for a strategic advising firm and I freelance on the side, which is a huge blessing, but it has taken me seven years to develop enough work to be a real full-time income.

In the beginning years of working from home I felt ashamed and worthless. Stripped of my title and salary I had no gauge to judge myself other that what others thought.

Facing myself in the mirror has been hard as well. I know it may seem shallow but I am not who I was before all the pain and struggle. Seeing the visible results of this battle and what it has stolen from my body is hard on my soul.

How to Improve Your Outlook

First, let me tell you that if you are positive all the time and you have fibromyalgia, you are either on amazing pain killers or you are putting up a front. That is my opinion, and I stand by it.

Next, let me say it is OK to feel negative about the challenges you face. Don’t allow it to overtake your life or mood, or stop you from pushing forward, but it is OK to feel like the challenge is too much at times and the whole situation you are in is unfair. It is unfair. None of this is fair and Karma, or your thoughts, are not what caused it.

We have fibromyalgia because life is full of challenges, and this is ours. It may feel like a punishment, but remind yourself that it is not.

Focus on the good days; the small things that still bring you happiness — even through all the pain. Finally, try to remember the positive things (and people) that have persevered through it all, and are the most important aspects of your life.

There is always something to be thankful for. By focusing on that fact, your outlook will improve.