Breaking Down the Stigma Attached to Fibromyalgia

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Understanding Fibromyalgia Stigma

Fibromyalgia is a challenging condition to grasp since it presents a list of symptoms that are difficult to identify and harder to describe.

Now, imagine trying to understanding fibro if you have never had it. You hear about a wide range of symptoms and a lack of accurate testing to diagnosis the condition with certainty.

You also hear about the strong relationship between fibro and mental health concerns — those having higher levels of anxiety and depression with fibromyalgia can have aggravated fibro symptoms. All of this information could lead others towards a flawed conclusion of the condition and its relationship with mental health concerns.

Then there is the information that has no grounding in reality. There are people who believe this misinformation and stigmatize people with fibromyalgia.

The Stigma of Fibromyalgia

Stigma is a powerful force. Put simply, stigma is a negative, unwanted, and invalid label put on a person or a group of people based on a trait they possess.

At times, the stigma can be a very general idea, like “fibromyalgia is a fake condition.” It can also be very specific, like “people with fibromyalgia are liars and they are abusing the system to stay sick.”

Rather than being confronted with one stigma, many groups have multiple stigmas to contend with. Obviously, this leads to a more complicated battle to correct the distorted ways of thinking.

As if the physical and psychological burdens of fibromyalgia were not enough, now you have the stigma to manage as well.

If you think the fight against stigmatization does not include you, think again. Everyone with fibromyalgia will encounter some negative experiences due to the stigma surrounding it at some point.

From family and friends to doctors and other professionals, stigmas exist in all areas. Being active and preventative allows you to gain more power and control over the circumstances and the stigmas.

How to Cope With Fibromyalgia Stigma: Be Well-Informed

Perhaps the most important factor in your ability to cope with the stigma of fibromyalgia is education. A lack of education usually breeds misinformation and stigma.

Gaining information will enable you to refute false claims, correct anyone spouting information that lacks credibility, and aid your ability to better understand yourself. Without education, you will not have a leg to stand on.

You are an important factor, but your experience will differ greatly from others with fibromyalgia. Because of this, you will do well to study up on the latest research and stats from the authorities on the condition.

This does not mean scrolling through social media will suffice. Try searching through academic and government institutions to find data that applies to your situation.

How to Reduce Fibromyalgia Stigma

Now that you are outfitted with strong information, who do you want to use it on?

Working to reduce fibromyalgia stigma on a large group of people will be much different than aiming at one person. The information will have a better chance of success if it is tailored to the particular person or group.

You may want to consider important people in your life to get started, like a misled friend or family member. They are crucial because reducing their stigma will have a directly beneficial impact on your functioning, symptoms, and life overall.

Also, you will have a solid understanding of the basis of their stigma and ways to reverse it. If you know your friend believes fibromyalgia is a figment of your imagination, you can pull together material that illustrates its very real effects.

Your attempts to dispel the stigmas attached to fibromyalgia should be done in a structured and conscientious way. It deserves your time and coordination — it is not something to do while unprepared.

The best results will occur following a frank discussion with your target in a calm, distraction-free area. Your target should understand the purpose of the meeting and what you hope to achieve through it. This is the path to success.

De-Stigmatize You

Even the best information delivered with impeccable timing and grace can fall on deaf ears.

Some people will never be interested in the truth — they will choose lies and deception over the facts because the facts lack the drama and excitement they are wishing to maintain. Worse, their refusal to believe you can make you doubt yourself.

Maybe fibromyalgia isn’t real. Maybe it is all in your head. Or maybe it is just a scheme concocted by doctors and pharmaceutical companies to make money.

Of course, these ideas aren’t true, but they can feel real in the moment. The greatest fibromyalgia stigma is the one that you have against yourself, so you must stay aware of your thoughts and practice kindness to your strongest ally: you.

Remind yourself that you know you, and you know fibromyalgia. People will always disagree with your position, but you are more resilient than their faulty beliefs.

Stigmas regarding fibromyalgia have existed from the beginning and will continue for some time. You can do your part by working to reduce the stigma among those in your life. More importantly, you can ensure you do not stigmatize yourself. Stigmatization will only increase your unwanted physical and emotional symptoms.

Remember, the best way to cope with the fibromyalgia stigma is to practice love and kindness to yourself and

others.