How to Relax Despite Fibromyalgia

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Relaxation, Stress and Fibro

The typical person is prone to experiencing high levels of stress from the events of daily life. The responsibilities at work, the chaos of home, caring for children, and maintaining relationships with important people all add to the experienced levels of stress. With the culmination of effects, these stressors can push past the comfortable range and into danger.

The typical person has a large buffer separating typical levels of stress from the problematic levels of stress. Someone with fibromyalgia does not have this luxury. Instead, you are constantly operating at a higher-than-normal stress with fibro due to the direct and indirect impact of the disease. You will have a buffer that is weaker and less responsive than people without fibro.

Imagine someone's stress is represented by water in a pot on the stove. Stress is the heat warming the pot. Fibro increases the heat to keep the water at a constant simmer — this means only minor increases in stress will send the water boiling over the edges and blowing the lid off.

High stress is related to so many physical and mental health problems that stress relief and stress reduction must be a priority.

Two-Stage Stress Plan

Some mistakenly think minimizing stress is a one-step process. This is not the case, though. It is best completed in two stages.

The first is stress relief. Here, the immediate problems and concerns that negatively influence your life are addressed in a way to change the situation or the way the situation is perceived. This will stop the boiling.

The second stage is stress reduction. Once the boil is reduced, you can begin working on reducing the simmer. By lowering the baseline stress, you build a stronger, more resilient buffer to use when unexpected stressors strike. This task is more difficult with fibro, but hugely important.

Stress Relief

How is your current stress? If you are experiencing a period of "boiling over," this is the place to start.

By ignoring your urgent needs, you set yourself up for failure and allow the stress to grow. No amount of relaxation can combat this type of stress — you must attack it directly. Follow these steps to obtain stress relief quickly and efficiently:

Identify the Contributor

What is the stress? Stressors can come from a myriad of people, places, situations and physical sensations.

Surely, fibro will present as a major stressor. Work to break this stress into smaller pieces to give yourself a level of control and power over the illness.

Assess Its Status

Once the stress or stresses are identified, you will be tasked with a decisive next step: labeling it as changeable or unchangeable.

Changeable stresses are situations you can resolve in a limited amount of time by using skills you already have. Unchangeable stresses cannot be resolved or reversed.

Being stressed because you do not like your shoes is changeable. Being stressed because you do not like fibro is unchangeable.

Having the wisdom to know what is changeable and what is not will save you tremendous energy in the future. There is no bigger drain of your resources that attempting to change something unchangeable.

Change It or You

If something is changeable, act on a plan based on rationality and logic. Take the steps with caution and thoughtfulness. Do not let the first sign of resistance slow you.

What about the unchangeable? Should you just ignore it? No, but you must begin working towards accepting it. Acceptance is the understanding of what the stress is and the acknowledgement of its unchangeable nature.

It does not mean that you have to like it. It only means you need to find another way to think about it, which relieves stress rather than adding to it.

Check Your Performance

This step is helpful in tracking your progress. You may find something you thought was changeable is proving otherwise.

Additionally, you may have acquired new information or skills that makes the unchangeable seem different. The reevaluation process is needed frequently.

Stress Reduction

When your emergent needs are addressed, the focus can shift to bringing down your pot’s overall temperature. This is done through a strategy of adding helpful coping skills that lower stress.

Rather than providing a list of what others do to help their own stress, focus on what you can do for your needs, wants, limitations and goals. To begin:

List your current stress-reducers. What helps you tackle your stress? Are there certain thoughts you utilize and prayers you recite? Do you watch funny movies or listen to angry music?

Maybe you are more focused on reducers that are behavioral like going for a walk or calling a friend on the phone. By listing these and making them available, you can be reminded of the benefit more regularly.

Modify Your Items

Modifying can be done in a number of ways, but the goal here is to make the best reducers better while removing

the coping skills that yield a neutral impact. The classic example here is watching TV.

Of course, watching your favorite show or exploring a new program is a healthy coping skill. Problems emerge when people take this behavior too far by staring at the TV for hours on end. This should not be considered a helpful stress-reducer.

Discover New Options

Stop recalling all of the coping skills fibro will not allow you to do. Be aware of its influence while striving to push past your comfort zone and experiment with new methods of stress reduction.

There is always another coping skill to discover for those who are looking. Ask what your friends do for stress management, or consult with professionals. Do not let yourself fall into the trap of thinking you have tried everything. There is an infinite number of ways to reduce stress — you are your only limitation here.

Rather than searching for another list of helpful measures to relieve and reduce stress, consider this two-step process that deals with different types of stress in independent and unique ways.

Most importantly, do not bind yourself to low expectations or the idea that stress reduction is futile. You can always get better, no matter how negatively fibro impacts you.