What Fibro Sufferers Want You to Know About Anxiety

by ADRIEL MALDONADO

Understanding Life With Anxiety and Fibromyalgia

Many, if not most, fibromyalgia sufferers also suffer from anxiety. It is not difficult to understand why being in constant pain can make a person feel stressed, or even anxious. But the link between fibromyalgia and anxiety goes much deeper than that.

Everyone is different, but in some cases it appears that anxiety has caused the onset of fibromyalgia. Even though the exact reason for this is unknown, it may be caused by the way anxiety affects the body's neurotransmitters. Damage to the neurotransmitters caused by anxiety or prolonged stress can increase nerve firing and cause pain and inflammation.

Anxiety can also cause hypersensitivity, which amplifies the symptoms you already have. Even if you did not have anxiety before developing fibromyalgia, there is a very strong chance you will later on.

The fact is there is an immensely close link between fibromyalgia and anxiety.

What makes all of this worse is the lack of understanding we get from family, friends, co-workers, sometimes even our own doctors. There are some things we would like you to know about what life is like for us to have both fibromyalgia and anxiety.

Being in Pain Makes Us Anxious

Pain is a stressful thing. Being in chronic pain means being chronically stressed or anxious.

Even the most positive person will have difficulty remaining positive 100 percent of the time when they constantly feel awful.

This persistent pain makes us feel on edge. The knowledge that there is little to be done for our pain is understandably worrisome, therefore leading to anxiety and panic.

The Possibility of Being in Pain Makes Us Anxious

Even when we have good days, we know the pain is going to come back. Even if we have a good week, a good month, we know the pain is coming back.

Every time we do something, we wonder anxiously: “What will be the payback for this trip to the store?" "How much am I going to hurt later for going on a walk?”

The anxiety of being in pain may hold us back from doing certain things. Sometimes the thought of going somewhere causes more anxiety than we can handle, knowing we may begin to feel bad while we are out, or we

may suffer dearly the next day, week or month.

Knowing Anxiety Makes Our Pain Worse Makes Us Anxious

When we start feeling anxious we immediately know it is going to make us feel worse, which in turn makes us even more anxious! It's a big, vicious cycle.

Anxiety Causes Its Own Set of Physical Symptoms

In addition to the physical symptoms of fibro, we also experience the symptoms of anxiety:

- Trouble breathing
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Chest pain
- Stomach and digestive problems (like persistent nausea)

And this is just naming a few.

Anxiety Can Be Just as Debilitating as Fibromyalgia

Pain and fatigue can hold you back from a lot of things. As can constant fear, worry and dread.

Imagine constantly worrying about something, or 20 things. Imagine perpetually jumping to the worst-case scenario.

I assure you, it is taxing to say the least. It leaves you feeling mentally, emotionally and physically drained and utterly exhausted.

Not All Anxiety Methods Work for Everyone

There are supplements that help some who suffer from anxiety, but not all. As someone who is on all recommended supplements and still has anxiety, I know this to be true.

There are also a lot of medications for anxiety, but not all of these work for every person. They also can cause unwanted side effects, some of which may be worse than the anxiety itself.

And then there are relaxation techniques and exercise. Again, not all of these work for everyone and when you add fibro to the mix, they may not even be an option for some of us.

I had a doctor recommend doing jumping jacks when I have panic attacks. I decided to try it, but after two or three I was in so much pain that it made my panic attack even worse.

Not Being Able to Remember Things or Think Clearly Makes Us Anxious

Fibromyalgia causes cognitive fatigue; also know as brain fog or fibro fog. This makes us forget things and have trouble focusing. Brain fog is frustrating, embarrassing and downright scary.

Imagine you were driving home and suddenly you couldn't remember how to get there. I feel it is safe to say that would cause most people to feel anxious.

Sometimes We Are Anxious About Nothing at All

Sometimes anxiety and panic attacks are triggered by things, like crowds, financial problems, driving, being the

center of attention — just to name a few.

However, sometimes we have anxiety for absolutely no reason at all. I have had more panic attacks than I can count come on out of nowhere. Sometimes we just feel a sense of dread, without knowing why.

Telling us everything is fine, that we have nothing to worry about, does not do any good because we already know that. We know there is no logical reason to worry the way we do, to panic about nothing, but we cannot control it.

Knowing People Think We're Faking or Exaggerating Makes Us Anxious

We know there are skeptics who do not believe fibromyalgia is a real illness. We know there are people who think getting rid of anxiety is as easy as thinking positively.

We know there are people who think we are exaggerating about how bad our symptoms are. We know there are people who think we just want attention.

These facts haunt us and make us anxious. Feeling like we have to prove our invisible illness is real makes us anxious.

What we hope you take away from this is that life with fibromyalgia and anxiety is difficult. But we are not asking for attention — we simply want to be understood.

Finding help for fibro and anxiety is difficult, but we are not giving up. We are fighting our hardest, and we would appreciate knowing you are fighting with us.