Why Pain Comparison Is Dangerous

by ANGELA FINLAY

Pain Comparison Can Be Detrimental to Your Health

It's natural to compare yourself to others who suffer from chronic pain or fatigue, or even become suspicious of false claims, resentful of sympathy-seekers, or doubtful of your own diagnosis. Unfortunately, these urges to compare yourself to other fibromyalgia sufferers can lead to a host of unnecessary discomforts, from self-esteem issues and depression to misplaced anger and nagging doubt. Learn where to expect comparisons, what you can do about it, and how to react more positively and proactively.

Common Points of Comparison

In many cases, exercise is a primary point of contention. Some fibromyalgia sufferers will claim that since they cannot handle regular, moderate exercise, anyone who can is surely not suffering from the same illness.

On the other hand, active people who come across this debate could dismiss their chronic symptoms and delay treatment because they are able to exercise. Since the physical symptoms of fibromyalgia are subjective (that is, they cannot easily be measured), physical ability becomes the default to separate "severe" cases from "mild" cases.

Of course, the primary goal for anyone who suffers from a chronic and debilitating condition is to slow the disease progression and find long-term relief as quickly as possible. Activity level shouldn't decide where you fall on the disease bracket, nor should other general abilities or disabilities. The best thing you can do for yourself is listen to your body while you work to resolve your symptoms, and respect others who are trying to do the same.

Overcome Misinformation and Help Your Body Heal

Getting lost in comparison means getting away from your own mind and body, and that's moving in the wrong direction. Do what it takes to relieve the emotional, psychological and physical stress that can come when you compare yourself to others:

- **Be open but gentle**. There's no point in forcing your opinion, since that will only stir up your own anger. If you feel that people are misunderstanding how you're feeling, be more communicative: let them know that you're not always in a flare, but that doesn't mean you're cured. People will change their expectations and responses when they understand a bit more about the disease.

- **Be understanding and adaptable**. You will probably run into quite a few people with some strong opinions on the matter, but everyone will benefit from working together. Rather than automatically disagreeing with insistent people, take their points to your doctor, to your support group, or to other health professionals to see what they have to say about it. You might find some helpful and relevant information, or else you can put that idea to rest and move on.
- **Focus on yourself**. Fibromyalgia is incredibly variable, and even if there was a way to categorize every

sufferer, doing so won’t help your case one bit. When you find yourself judging or criticizing other stances on fibro pain and appropriate treatment, remember that it’s much more effective to simply turn your attention back to your own mind and body. Practice mindful meditation, yoga or tai chi to center your mind and energize your spirit with healing thoughts and self-love.

The bottom line is that you never know the whole story behind somebody’s chronic pain disorder, and not only is it unfair to assume that you do, it’s unhealthy, too. Take the opportunity to develop a fruitful discussion on fibro symptoms and possible treatment, or else concentrate your efforts on more positive thoughts and actions.