The Fibromyalgia Coping Box

by ERIC PATTERSON

Take Pain Management Into Your Hands

Living with fibro is pain, fatigue, headaches, sleep problems, depression and anxiety. Symptoms strike suddenly or else slowly build and head towards you like a wave in the ocean. Either way, you know another flare-up is not a question of “if” but “when” even with the best prevention.

Unfortunately, you cannot control your fibromyalgia or the negative influence fibromyalgia has on your mood, energy, worries and overall outlook on life. Trying to control your symptoms can leave you feeling letdown and disappointed when another flare comes. Instead, invest time and energy into mental health symptom management.

Create a Coping Box

Coping with fibromyalgia through a coping box can provide relief during flares that leave you able to do little else. A coping box is any type of box available. A shoebox packed with comforting items is a great start. Decorate it however you like and fill it with items that will bring pleasure when you need it the most. Here are types of objects to consider:

- **Self-soothing**. Try to include articles that work on all five senses. A stuffed animal for touch, your favorite CD to listen to, a good smelling hand lotion, a piece of candy to taste and a picture of your family or a happy memory are all options. Be creative and find objects that elicit strong, positive reactions for you.
- **Emotional awareness**. These tools will help in identifying and expressing your thoughts and feelings. A journal, feeling chart and art supplies are appropriate here. There are likely many issues you’re going through with your fibromyalgia, and expressing them allows you to process your experience in a therapeutic way. Share your creations with your family, friends and the professionals in your life. It can provide them an insight into your life.
- **Distraction.** Occupying your mind during a flare is important. The more you focus on the pain, the more present and intense the pain will feel. Add jigsaw or crossword puzzles, a cross-stitch or knitting project or your favorite movie to your box. Distractions can give your mind a needed break to reorganize and recharge.
- **Mindfulness.** A well-rounded coping box is a helpful coping box. Mindfulness is the opposite of distraction. Including a meditation or relaxation CD, grounding objects or breathing techniques that will focus your mind on the pain and, hopefully, work to minimize it. Mindfulness takes practice but the results make it worthwhile.
- **Bonus items**. There is no “right way” to build a coping box. Cram it full of things that make you happy or remind you that even the worst flares get better with time.
- **Crisis plan**. A crisis plan is a must for the moments when nothing else seems to be helping. Include a list of available, helpful supports with their contact information in your box. Make note of which contacts are most useful depending on your symptoms. Contacting your doctor would not be ideal if your pain is low just as your niece would be ineffective if you symptoms were severe.

Conclusion

Even the act of building a coping box is therapeutic and it’s easy to see why. Placing so many helpful objects in one container is a fine way to spend an afternoon. A coping box may not end your flares but it will make them easier to handle.