Sabotaging Yourself When You Have Chronic Pain

by BARBARA LEECH

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There are days I swear I can feel gravity. Today is one of them; I am tired and worn, my heart feels heavy, and the weight of all my work and responsibilities is overwhelming. Today, it all simply seems like too much, and the worst part is I have actually been my worst enemy.

How We Sabotage Ourselves

Why would I take on such blame? Well, my current condition is the result of knowingly taking on endless tasks and pushing through, despite how I felt. I did this knowing all along it would impact my overall chronic pain and fatigue — I brought this flare-up on myself.

So, now I am struggling and I am the reason why. I have been non-stop busy with activities for my kids, work, and family commitments. I volunteered to be an assistant for my son's little league team, so several hours a week since early May has been spent helping his team stay organized and keeping 12 kids from bouncing off the walls of the dugout.

The weather has not been kind to my fibromyalgia either. It has been damp and cold, and each week I have felt worse than the week before.

Today is a Monday, which followed another busy weekend. Baseball games, an outdoor birthday party, and housework as I try to catch up from a crazy workweek.

I have deadlines to meet today, but I am in so much pain it is hard to think. The fatigue and brain fog is so strong, I might as well be trying to walk through quicksand and figure out my direction while blindfolded.

This morning I found that verbalizing the actual words I was thinking was too great of a challenge for me. I am fighting tears from the pain and I simply want to surrender.

I know I must find a way to keep going, but it is so hard when others around me simply do not understand the weight of my words when I say, "I have reached my limit today."

The people around me really do try to offer compassion, but I feel a distance form between us when anyone stops to listen to me tell them about my week. Nobody likes to hear complaints, and nobody seems to understand — not really.

Perhaps you also sabotage yourself by taking on too much or doing an activity (or several) that you know will trigger pain. We all have typical sabotages that seem to occur on a pretty regular basis.

Agreeing to Help Others When You Actually Could Use Help Yourself

I do this all the time and I don't imagine I will stop. If I see someone is struggling, I feel compelled to offer assistance, even when I know I will pay the price in pain or unbearable exhaustion and fatigue.

If my kids expect me to be at an event, no matter how I feel or what the weather, I go. I just keep going or helping because I cannot bear to let anyone down.

Trying to Pretend You Don't Have Chronic Pain

For me, work has been busy lately and they often throw extra tasks at me. I do them without question and without expressing I maybe have too much on my plate.

They do not know I suffer from lupus, thyroid disease and fibromyalgia. I try and present myself as the ideal employee they would want to have, and honestly it seems easier and safer than trying to explain what I have and what it does to me.

I do not address my health conditions with my coworkers either. I know perhaps if I shared information about my condition, I would garner support and help for those tough days, and there's nothing wrong or weak about admitting my struggles.

But, I fear the reaction of my coworkers and employer would actually be a change in how they saw me and my capabilities.

Not Fighting for Your Needs

Recently I was at my niece's birthday party. It was going on hour four of standing around chatting and making small talk, and it was getting cold outside and my sweater was in the car.

This party was at the end to a busy day that began with an early wake-up and more than four hours at the baseball field for my sons. I was at a physical turning point for my day and I could feel my energy plummeting.

I signaled to my husband that I really needed to go home and possibly lay down. I was shaking and felt so exhausted it was hard to follow conversations any longer.

I had clearly pushed myself too far that day (and let's be honest, the entire week prior). My husband came over holding my five-month-old nephew and handed him to me, smiled, then wandered off to throw a baseball with the other kids at the party.

After an hour, I found a chair to settle into with my shoulders burning with pain from the weight of holding my sturdy nephew. I did nothing to try and get someone else to hold him — that would be admitting defeat when I really wanted to hold a baby.

Did I go to my husband and re-emphasize that more than three hours at the party was enough, I was really feeling awful, and we needed to say our goodbyes? No. I did not push or fight for what I needed at all.

Making Poor Food Choices Knowing They Will Cause Pain

Eating healthy is hard, especially at a ball field or a birthday party. Excuses, I know, but the struggle is real. I make bad food and beverage choices at least once per week (probably more) and I always pay the price.

With chronic pain you need to be your own advocate and make smart choices for your health and well-being. Just about every time I get myself into a full blown downward spiral, I realize I am the one to blame because of my choices or because I did not take the initiative to verbalize my needs.