Coping with Lack of Mobility

by ERIC PATTERSON

Adjusting to a Wheelchair

MS has knack for chipping away at you. Your memory, your ability to think clearly, your speech and your emotions seem to be under a full assault from MS. At your last appointment, your doctor gave you news that you have been dreading for months. Though it seemed shocking at first, you knew it was coming – you have been increasingly unsteady. Perhaps you've had a fall or two. Even if you escaped serious injury, you know your walking is shaky.

You now need to utilize a wheelchair for your daily mobility. This might seem like a crushing blow for you and a victory for MS, but following a few tips and practicing some cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions will help you recognize the best in a bad situation.

Acknowledge and Accept

Unsurprisingly, the decision to use a wheelchair is experienced as a loss. It is seen as a loss of mobility, freedom and failure to limit the negative effects of MS. Feeling sad, angry and a level of confusion is natural. Rather than deny your feelings, express them in writing or verbally. Share your feelings with the supports in your life while letting them know you are only looking for validation. You know that they cannot improve your physical state.

Check your Expectations

Expectations are a lens through which you see the world. For example, if you are promised five dollars and given ten dollars, you will feel pleasantly surprised and happy. If you are promised twenty dollars and only given ten dollars, you will feel let down. Your expectations skew your perception of the same outcome. Too often, people faced with a new transition will either set expectations far too high or too low. Work to find appropriate balance. Expect challenges, mistakes and failures. If you predict your first outings in a wheelchair to proceed smoothly, you will be dejected and demotivated to try again when you have trouble. Relearning activities is about trial and error. Expect many errors at first.

Set Goals

What activities and experiences do you want to have? Work with a team to brainstorm ways to simplify and modify the goals to be manageable and potentially successful. Surely some activities will not be plausible but a creative mind can find a substitute that is equally as enjoyable.

Get Comfortable with Discomfort

This refers to mental or psychological discomfort. People spend too much time and energy avoiding discomfort when, in fact, the discomfort forces you to improve and grow. The crisis is an opportunity. Maybe the comfortable

course is to stay at home because you view it as safe. You fear others will judge you harshly if they see you in a wheelchair. The more you stay at home, the smaller your world becomes as depression and anxiety grow. Getting out of the house is extremely difficult but the rewards will always outweigh the risks. Remember, what is easy and what is best are rarely the same thing.

Conclusion

Many life transitions are stressful, even happy ones. Your transition to a wheelchair may feel like a failure or a shortcoming. It is not. The only failure is succumbing to MS. Break out of the cage and regain your quality of life. It will look and feel uncomfortable but anything worthwhile is.