Experiencing MS Sensitivity to Touch

by LIBBY SELINSKY

Oversensitivity: The Aftereffects of Neuropathy

If you have had neuropathy from your multiple sclerosis (MS), chances are you have had different forms of residual symptoms once your flare-up has settled down.

Spasticity, tingling, and pins and needles are all very common, but today I am talking about oversensitivity to touch.

I will say right up front that I have not sought out any prescription assistance in reducing my oversensitivity. I haven't felt anything I was ever given really aided in reducing the discomfort of my peripheral neuropathy. I have just dealt with the pain I live with daily.

The pain is mild, for now, but sometimes it is almost maddening. You know what I am talking about — that feeling of your clothes scratching your skin. The painful pressing and rubbing that begins and eventually feels as though razor blades are cutting into your skin.

I Like That Fabric!

Clothing can be wonderful, but it can also be the bane of my existence. Mostly, what it is made of will decide the fate of an item.

Things that were developed by torturous masterminds:

- Anything made of wool
- Heavy jeans
- Cheap cotton
- Canvas coats and hats
- Anything with bulky or badly placed seams
- Shirt tags
- Most pajamas
- Anything wrinkly

To an outsider, it can seem as though anything and everything can irritate and hurt a person with MS. And they're not wrong — give something time and I am sure I will become irritated by it being on my body.

The truth is, when I was in the middle of my first big relapse I wanted to rip my skin off and walk around without it. That is how painful neuropathy can be; your body is forced into a strange purgatory between nothing and everything.

Our brain is struggling to reconcile an unending paradox. When the relapse has subsided, a person's body is left

with scars — plaques on the lesions — within the brain and spine. Our bodies do their best to spackle the gaps left by our ravenous immune symptoms, but the repair is never as true as the original.

I have endured this struggle for eight years now. I cope with the oversensitivity in its utility by buying nice clothes that fit me properly.

Yoga pants are my friend, as are skirts of all types and styles. I buy jeans that are made of thinner material with a spandex/ cotton blend. Shearling boots are wonderful in the winter time — their furry interior is exactly what my toes need.

Sleeping Gear Is Important

Sleep is incredibly important to us all and is something that eludes many of us with MS. Pajamas are an issue in and of their own.

I often have nights when I am incredibly tired and actually capable of falling asleep. If it were not for my pajamas, and my sheets for that matter, sleep would come easily.

Next page: struggling with expressing what we're feeling

Sleeping Gear Is Important

I will lie down and get cozy and feel sleep crawling into my brain — until I realize the seam on my pants is rolled up and pressing on my leg. I try to ignore it, but the pain hits my nerves and I will begin to meticulously smooth out every wrinkle until my clothes are perfect.

Most of the time the damage has already been done. Once the pain has begun to creep its way into my side, I don’t have a chance of it going away. I will just have to turn over and start fresh on the other side.

Do Seamless Pajamas Exist?

Seriously, do they? I have been looking for them for ages. I have considered sleeping in the buff, however I have a child and anyone with children knows they can walk in at any time.

Until mine is grown and out of the house, seamless pajamas have become my greatest quest in shopping. I am writing this now in hopes that someone will hear my call and point me in the right direction.

People with MS need pajamas that are soft, loose fitting and do not have any seams. I swear, the maker of said pajamas would make so much money supplying people with MS with cozy sleepwear.

I have the softest sheets in the world to boot. If you were to picture a cloud, that would be what my bed feels like. It was a life-changing thing for my sleep cycle when I invested in a foam mattress and high thread-count sheets.

I never realized how important texture actually was until I had to face its ugly side on a daily basis. Now I find myself wishing I had focused on these things all of my life!

Oversensitivity Is Not a Character Flaw

I realize most people do not understand exactly how important comfort is to people with oversensitive nerves. Our reactions to textures and touch can seem overly dramatic and picky.

I have struggled in my own personal life to convey exactly what it is I am experiencing, while attempting to avoid sounding heavy-handed or overly dramatic. After all, the early days of this disease defined our experiences within the scope of our mental health rather than our neurological health.

My husband, who loves me dearly and works hard to understand, has fallen short from time to time.

He loves to touch my legs, to grab them or pet my thigh. I used to love and appreciate these gestures of affection from him.

Since my disease began, his touch is painful. I have explained this to him many times, but old habits are hard to break. He has forgotten from time to time, grabbing my leg in the wrong way and causing pain. I have snapped at him and felt hurt by his overlooking of my needs.

Oversensitivity is a part of our lives on the micro level with the brushing of fabric onto our skin, and on the macro level with the touches of our loved ones' affections being conveyed as pain.

My clothing is my constant reminder of the separation I now have between the person I was and the person I have become. My brain cannot remember what the experience of feeling that touch on my leg used to be like.

My memories remind me of how my heart used to fill up and overflow — but the memories are not capable of evoking the sensual chills I know once existed.

I dream for a day when I can have it all back, when touch is easy and pure. I want to run my hands across velvet and feel it in all of its smoothness. I hope someday I will feel it all again.