Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone With MS

by ABIGAIL BUDD

Getting Out of Your Pesky Comfort Zone

Multiple sclerosis (MS) makes me lazy. There, I've said it — a controversial statement but it's very often true for me.

I have found myself stuck in a rut so many times since my diagnosis in 2008 and am guilty, at times, of hiding behind it so I don't have to challenge myself and try new things.

I often find myself preferring to stay in the safety of my house and will make excuses to myself to justify staying in all weekend. I've cancelled social engagements before, for example, due to the fear of fatigue.

I'll say to myself, "If you go out tonight you'll be exhausted all weekend, better to stay in and have an early night." Or I'll dream up other excuses to do with proximity of bathrooms or the possibility of parking spaces, usually days and days before the actual event so by the time I'm due to go, I've talked myself out of it.

As a result, my social circle has shrunk considerably and opportunities get fewer and fewer.

MS and Fear

A lot of this nonsense is driven by fear and I've written about this a lot over the years. We MSers have so much to be fearful of and sometimes it's easier, safer and more comfortable to stay indoors.

In fact, sometimes the urge to stay in bed with the covers over my head and not face the day at all is overwhelming!

But what does this fear and hiding do for our confidence and mental health? The less I do the less I *want* to do and the less I feel able to do. This cycle of cowardice does nothing for my self-esteem and every now and then I feel the need to challenge myself.

Abi's Experience With Stepping Out of Her Comfort Zone

A few weeks ago I gave a lecture at Brighton University in the UK on disability in the criminal justice system. I was asked by the senior lecturer in criminology, who is a friend of a friend and they were doing a module on inequality and she thought I'd be perfect.

I have 12 years' experience working in the criminal justice system and I have obvious disabilities so she thought the students would benefit from my knowledge and skills. I jumped at the opportunity as it will lead to more work at the university and I knew it would challenge me and get me out of my comfort zone.

Preparing for the lecture was easy as I just thought about what I wanted to say and prepared a presentation to

prompt me as I talked. I practiced at home to make sure it was long enough and covered the points I wanted it to.

As the day got nearer though, the fear and anxiety started rearing their ugly heads! I found myself focusing on all that could potentially go wrong rather than trusting myself to do a good job.

The night before I even wondered if I could get away with pretending to be ill, saying to myself, “They’ll never know I’m not actually ill, what if I actually was?”

I made sure I did all the usual micro-planning first so I knew I could park and find the bathrooms easily. I had run out of excuses and knew I had to get on with it.

Reaping the Rewards

Anyway, I didn’t pull out and arrived at the agreed time awash with nerves, shaking and sweating and consumed with anxiety.

I took a deep breath as I trundled into the lecture theatre on my mobility scooter and delivered the lecture. It went down well and I was asked lots of questions afterwards which I answered happily.

Nothing went wrong either! I didn’t fall over or wet myself in front of everyone, I didn’t lose the ability to talk halfway through and I wasn’t consumed with fatigue afterwards.

I did, however, feel an enormous sense of achievement and was elated for days. I was so proud of myself that I hadn’t taken the easy way out and cancelled.

I’m not suggesting we all start asking the impossible of ourselves, though. I’d love to run a marathon, for example, but that is never going to happen.

Fatigue, anxiety and MS are very real issues that genuinely prevent us from achieving all we could if we didn’t have MS. Mobility issues prevent me from doing loads simply because of the logistics of getting to places on my scooter, but I know I’m guilty of sometimes staying in my comfort zone because it’s safe.

I recently started doing Pilates to challenge myself physically, and the benefits are so good for me that I’m glad I pushed myself. There’s always a little bit more you can do to challenge yourself mentally and physically and get yourself out of the rut you’ve created for yourself.

The benefits for self-esteem, confidence and self-respect are enormous, which can only beneficial to our overall health.

What can you do to challenge yourself?