5 Ways to Manage a Multiple Sclerosis Relapse

by ERICA WILSON

Multiple Sclerosis Exacerbation

You know the signs. Your joints and hips are hurting. What is going on? It's a relapse knocking on your door to wreak havoc in your life. Some days, it feels as though multiple sclerosis (MS) is in a constant battle with you, and a multiple sclerosis exacerbation is not fun to deal with.

The Cause

Sometimes, there is no rhyme or reason to the relapse. More often than not, though it is triggered by:

- Illness
- Elevated body temperature
- Stress
- Lack of sleep

In the summer it is almost impossible to avoid elevated body temperatures. I mean, we can stay in air conditioning all day, but then we get stressed because we cannot go anywhere! Try as you might, there may be no relief.

How to Handle a MS Relapse

So, this is what I find to be the best way to survive a relapse.

1. Rest

Rest is the most difficult thing for me. I used to think that if I spent some extra time in bed, but continued my activities, that I was resting. Now, I understand this is not the case if you live alone. I've been there as well. Please call your friends. They want to help. True rest is lying in bed, only getting up to go to the washroom.

2. Relax

This is not a joke and it can be hard to learn how to relax. Some days I lose count of how many days I have to relax for. Thankfully, my perpetual fiancée has been a godsend. If I make a move to leave the bed, he stops me immediately and gets me whatever I need. I do get to go to the bathroom, though sometimes I need his help getting there.

But make sure to rest in bed, under the covers, with a fan on your nightstand. Maybe relax with a book too and some snacks. Something about being stuck in bed makes you want to eat snacks.

3. Medication

I have mixed feelings about medicine. I personally try to keep as many chemicals as I can out of my body, but sometimes MS causes issues that most natural things cannot touch (at least right away, which is when I need relief).

If your doctor has prescribed medication for your symptoms, keep taking them. Even if you feel better, stay on them. That means they are working. If you feel like you need a break, talk to your doctor first! I know it is easier to just stop taking them, but you never know the consequences of stopping medication cold turkey.

4. Don’t Research

Do not, I repeat, do not search the internet when you are in a multiple sclerosis exacerbation. It’s the last place you want to hang out. Our curious minds will wander and see scary things lurking on the internet about MS. Like “Nightmare on Elm Street” scary. Stay away. Reading about the what ifs and the possibilities will definitely trigger stress that will be difficult to get rid of, which can cause a relapse.

5. Talk to Your Doctor About Multiple Sclerosis Exacerbations

Last year, I relapsed while I was on vacation in Vegas. It was strange because all of a sudden, I could not write. I could not sign my name. I put in a call to my doctor, called in a prescription for steroids, and voila.

You may have to take an IV dose of Solumedrol, or they may put you on an oral tablet to be taken in stair steps. I cannot say they always work for me. I usually will try it once per year, because that is about as often as they work for me. Figure out what works for you, so you are able to speak up about your treatment.

The Takeaway

If at some point during your recovery you feel good enough to step outside, go to a nearby tree, or on your deck, or anywhere close enough to quickly go back to bed when you feel the weakness creep in. When you feel it behind your eyes (I know you do), you suddenly feel so tired and the only thing you did was walk out onto the deck and sit down. Listen to the whispers of your body. It is protecting you from the beast that is MS.