Having Surgery with MS

by LEEANNE LAPUM

Coping With Surgery When You Have MS

I've dealt with the pain brought on by MS for years. We're old friends. Over the years I've come to realize that pain is my constant companion, 24/7. Not a welcome one, but I've learned to accept it to a certain extent.

Since I have nerve pain everywhere from the upper torso down, serious pain tends to get my attention. I recently had severe pain that definitely sounded an alarm. Two years ago during a hospitalization it was discovered that I have a one-inch gallstone. The doctors contemplated doing surgery at the time but I wasn't strong enough.

I was sent home without having that problem resolved. We were left with doing our own research trying to find a solution.

'Home Remedy'

My dear husband got on the Internet determined to find a 'home remedy.' After spending many hours doing research, he found a "magical" solution. He was so excited. He couldn't wait to get started. I, however, had my doubts. He rushed out to the kitchen to prepare the problem-solving elixir. He mixed olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar and white grape juice together.

He brought in a 24 ounce container for me to start my home treatment. All I had to do was drink four ounces at a time every 15 minutes until it was all gone. Sounds simple. Believe me, it was easier said than done. Have you ever sat down and enjoyed a warm drink of Italian salad dressing without seasoning? Probably not, and for good reason.

Not only did it taste terrible but it left my mouth feeling... slimy. Eventually I got down to the last four ounces. My husband came in for my final dose. He cheerfully said,"Come on. You can do it! This needs to be all gone."

I had obediently downed most of that disgusting stuff. My response to him was, "If you want it gone, you drink it!" Not surprisingly, he refused.

Flying on Autopilot

Two years later I have finally gotten some relief. Normally the stress of upcoming surgery would be an aggravation. This time? Not really. In fact, I looked forward to it. I've had many medical procedures and I've learned to just put my mind on autopilot and conquer them one at a time. That seems to work with my MS symptoms.

Next page: finding humor, and tips for preparing for surgery.

Flying on Autopilot

I slept well the night before surgery. In the morning I showered, put on a nightgown, dried my hair and headed off for surgery. I looked at it this way – I'll take a good nap for a few hours and wake up ready to go home. The temporary minimal pain I'll experience will be worth it. Just knowing that I'd be able to eat without experiencing pain helped make the whole experience something I actually looked forward to.

Surgery was done on an outpatient basis. I don't remember much of the ride home. I undoubtedly slept all the way. I know I went straight to bed because that's where I woke up a few hours later. This is where it gets interesting. Instead of finding one one-inch gallstone they found two gallstones the size of half a dollar, which had been sent to pathology.

Finding Humor

I can't even begin to tell you how many times during my medical experiences something happens to make us laugh. This was another of those occasions. My husband was so disappointed that he wasn't given the stones. He had plans for them. He was going to make them into matching earrings. Seriously? What woman in her right mind would want to go around wearing a faulty body part?

Another plus to the situation is that the pain pills I am on make me a little loopy. Loopier than normal, that is. The doctor actually said that MS patients may seem a little disconnected after surgery. Not only do I have MS and chemotherapy affecting my brain functions but I also have the anesthesia from gallbladder surgery affecting me. That gives me an excuse no matter how you look at it.

Tips to Prepare For Surgery with MS

- Mentally take it as just one more challenge to conquer. It helped me to look forward to the next day when it would all be over instead of dreading it.
- Follow pre-surgery directions very carefully.
- Relax and put yourself in the hands of trained medical professionals.
- I thought of it as taking a LONG nap. That put me into relaxed state of mind instead of being stressed out.
- As always, look for the humor. For example, I was put back together using medical grade crazy glue. No stitches, staples or Steri-Strips. Just glue (which my husband likes to mess with when it starts peeling off).