Maintaining Friends and Relationships With Migraine

by BARBARA LEECH

Keeping Strong Relationships With Migraine

Many people who suffer with migraines seem to do so without much support. Friends, family and even close loving relationships change when you are in pain so often and are not the carefree person you used to be.

It's tough when you battle debilitating migraine pain, yet lack a strong shoulder to lean on. The fact is friends and relationships can slowly change once migraines become frequent.

I used to blame myself for canceling at the last minute, avoiding loud places, bright sunlight, or alcohol. I disliked myself because I was no longer much fun to be around.

Isolation and the demise of friendships or romance can be emotionally devastating to someone with this horrible condition. I say this from personal experience.

Migraines and Unhealthy Relationships

I did not always have the love and support I have now, which is precisely why I appreciate and recognize the vast difference in my life, now that I do.

Today I am married to someone who truly cares about my health and knows how to help someone with migraine, but that was not always my situation. I was married for more than 19 years to someone who lacked empathy and became outwardly angry when any illness occurred.

This was not limited to migraines or the fact that I also battle lupus. Everything I was experiencing seemed to cause an argument or distain.

With my migraines and a chronic illness that would randomly attack my organs, I was always in "trouble" for being in pain. I was also raised to believe marriage was forever and I was convinced that nobody could love me because I was such a worthless burden.

It took me years to devise a way to leave, support myself and my two daughters and simply believe I could survive on my own.

So, I am here to tell you that if you do not have a supportive partner or spouse, or you have friends that have abandoned you, then perhaps it is time to rethink how your relationship works — or if it simply doesn't.

Also, note that relationships are a two-way street; there are things you can do that will ease the impact that chronic migraines have on your friendships, relationships and life.

How to Make the Most of Your Relationships With Migraines

I have learned there are a few ways I can stay connected to friends and maintain my relationships — and still take care of me.

Educate Those Around You

It seems like everyone knows what migraines are, but few seem to “get it” when you say you must cancel plans because of the pain. Often people confuse migraines with headaches — they do not understand the intensity of what you are dealing with.

I found it helps to share information or links to reputable migraine organizations, which explain exactly what is happening to a person with migraines and what it feel like to suffer with them.

Express Your Regrets

Maybe you have canceled dinner at the last minute with a friend, maybe you feel you appear lazy or like you are making up excuses, or maybe you are devastated you have missed the last few family gatherings. Say it.

So much is lost when people leave things to be interpreted by others. Don’t just apologize for canceling or missing an event, explain how devastating migraines are and how upsetting it is to have to cancel.

Your friends and family are not mind readers. Let them know it makes you sad to miss out on these activities.

Seize Good Days

There are days when your head is clear and there are no signs of a migraine to be found. Enjoy them.

Call that friend you canceled on five times this past month and treat her to coffee. Do something special for a loved one or make your partner’s favorite dessert.

Show them that when you are well, you are still ready to give them — and your relationship — 100 percent.

Text on Bad Days

There are days I am in such pain that I do not want to speak to anyone. Text messages are a great way to check in, say hello, share a quick message about your week and not have to speak one single word.

Re-Evaluate Your Migraine Strategy

If you have been having more frequent migraines and it is impacting not only your life, but your relationships, it may be time to talk to your doctor.

Keep a journal and see if there are any patterns of food or activity that are triggering your migraines. Consider new treatments you have yet to try. Take steps for a healthier tomorrow and a greater chance to be present in your relationships.

I thought twice before writing this (OK maybe four or five times), but I feel my journey is for a reason. If you battle migraines and feel like they are slowly destroying all of your relationships, I hope my words reach you, touch your heart and help you find your courage to expect more.

You can have caring, loving relationships and still take care of yourself when migraines strike. Remember to offer information and facts to those who do not understand what you are going through.

Forgive them if they think it is “only a headache” but re-evaluate the relationship if they are typically angry at you for being “sick again.” Explain your feelings — how you miss your friendship and feel devastated when you have to cancel plans. And always make the effort to make the most of migraine-free days.