Finding Friends With Migraine

by BARBARA LEECH

What It's Like Making Friends With Migraine

There is a saying, “There is safety in numbers,” and perhaps that is why I felt safer in my own skin once I developed friendships with people going through similar struggles as mine. Recently I found a support group at my yoga studio for those of us who suffer from chronic pain conditions, like migraine. Suddenly, I am not alone.

There are also many support groups for migraine pain sufferers offered in several states around the country, supported through the American Council for Headache Education (ACHE). If you are in need of support, there are people just like you who can offer that camaraderie you may be missing right now.

What a Support Group Can Do

You may be asking yourself, why seek out a support group for dealing with migraines? Well, first and foremost there is peace that comes from talking with someone who knows exactly how it feels to live a life interrupted.

The dreaded migraine attack is something I live in fear of, yet know will inevitably occur, disrupting my plans, my work, my passions — my life. There is no greater feeling than talking with someone that understands that.

I find this peace is lacking in other relationships I have already. My friends and the family members in my life live relatively healthy, normal lives without a chronic condition lurking around every corner, so they have no idea what I am talking about most of the time.

They can be judgmental about why I must cancel plans and why I seem less “happy” than they do on a daily basis. Meanwhile, I am thinking, “Walk a mile in my shoes.”

Sometimes I wish my friends could do this, if not for a mile than for just a few yards, in order for them to have some semblance of an idea of what I am going through. In fact, take that walk in bright sunlight and let me know how happy you feel!

Migraines can hit me without warning. I can be excited to be going to a friend’s barbeque and wake up that morning with my head pressurized and feeling ready to explode. There are just so many times my plans and life are disrupted that I feel overwhelmed and it’s hard to articulate what I am feeling, even to an old friend.

It is on this type of day when one of my healthy friends, one who never gets sick and can’t remember when she last had a bad headache, can give me a moment of pause as I try and make that connection I so desperately seek.

In fairness to her, she does not live with what I do and though she tries to offer a wealth of compassion, I feel a distance form as she listens to me tell her about what I am going through and why I must cancel our plans. She feels sympathy for my struggles, but she does not understand, not really.

By reaching out to a support group I have found others who are going through similar struggles and that has filled the void left by my some of my other friendships. Honestly, the more friends you have the better, and having ones who totally “get” your struggle is well-worth the effort of finding them.

Finding Friendships With Fellow Migraine Sufferers

My suggestion is, if you feel a disconnect with your regular circle of friends because of your migraines, expand your circle to include a few who either have migraines or deal with chronic pain. They will offer you support that connects with your emotions in a very genuine way.

Here are a few suggestions on how to find these friendships:

Join a Support Group

This can be on Facebook, or through the actual websites and blogs of other support groups for chronic pain. In most cases if you do a search on Facebook (just type migraine) in the search menu, a list of suggestions will appear.

These are people from all over the country and the world, but chances are there are a few that live near you. Even if they are not local, online friendships can offer amazing support.

Contact ACHE to Find Local Chapters

There are some across the country and they are often held at clinics or in hospital meeting rooms, and can be led by either a fellow migraine sufferer or even a nurse. It is mainly a way to connect and gain support, but it can lead to great friendships with local people.

Start a Migraine Support Group of Your Own

You can make a difference to others while supporting yourself by starting your own migraine pain group. Meet at a park or at the local coffee shop or public library. Keep it very casual and easy for others to attend.

Once you have a few people who enter into your circle of friends and understand your migraines, you will find that making plans with them is less stressful.

If you need to cancel, they totally understand. If you need encouragement, they are more likely to know what to say. These are friendships that can ease the loneliness that migraines can cause and in turn, you can make a difference to others who are also suffering and possibly in need of a friend — one just like you.