4 Coping Skills for Chronic Migraine Sufferers

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Coping Skills for Migraines

I've been a migraineur for 20 years. Yes, 20. I'm 32 years old, and I can remember when I was diagnosed when I was 12 years old. No one else in my grade was having chronic headaches – at least no one that I knew of. It was isolating, and a bit scary, but I was able to develop coping skills for migraines.

Over the past 20 years, I have developed plenty of coping skills to deal with my migraines. But here is a bit of a secret: I'm still learning. My migraines change periodically, and what works for a while sometimes stops working, and I am left floundering for a bit until I find something else that works.

So, fellow migraineurs, it is normal to feel a bit despondent at times. But if you are having chronic pain, you need to develop a "toolbox" of sorts, to deal with it. Here's what works for me.

Journaling

To deal with my chronic pain, I have developed a chronic journaling habit. Not shocking, I am sure, as I am a writer, but the beautiful thing about putting pen to paper is that there is no right or wrong way to do it.

Go to a store and pick out any type of notebook that speaks to you – a spiral bound notebook will do. Or, find a journal that is beautiful with an inspirational quote. Or, order a classic black Moleskine. Any work. Once you have your medium, pick up a pen or pencil and just write your thoughts. Write your feelings. Don't stop until you have emptied them onto the page. Then, do it again and again and again.

And another thing that I do? I carry a pen with me at all times. If I am out and about and I do not have a notebook with me, I find whatever paper I can find – a receipt, an envelope, a napkin – I use that if I feel the need to empty out my thoughts.

Try it out. It is therapeutic. Will it get rid of your migraine? Maybe not. But it may lessen your tension, which never hurts.

Meditation

This is a new one for me. Over the years, I have had therapists and doctors recommend meditation. I've scoffed at it and thought, "There's no way in heck I can do that!", until I had a therapist actually lead me in a guided meditation. I never quieted my mind completely and I rarely can, but I realized that was ok. Maybe that is the goal for some people. But for me, the goal has become finding a few minutes to just be still with myself, and sometimes, be ok with my pain.

I have not evolved in my practice beyond guided meditations and I may never be able to meditate on my own, but I have discovered that there is an abundance of resources. You can search YouTube and download apps on your

phone. You can buy books, purchase CDs – there are so many resources.

My favorite app is called Insight Timer. It is completely free, with over a million meditations, and there are even meditations specific to headaches.

Yoga

I have been doing yoga *almost* as long as I have been experiencing migraines. To me, the two are related. When I started experiencing migraines, my mom dragged me to a yoga class. “I guarantee this will help your migraines!” she told me.

Well, she wasn’t entirely wrong. Yoga was not exactly a “fix” for my headache. I did not walk away pain-free, but it did help my anxiety and tension. After going for a while, I began to learn *pranayama*, or breathing practices, which I incorporated into my daily life. The *asanas*, or postures, became not only exercises but a practice that allowed me to focus on something bigger than myself.

My yoga practice waxed and waned over the years. However, shortly after my son was born, about four years ago, I started experiencing anxiety. I came back to yoga and found a reduction in both my anxiety and migraines. I was so inspired that I enrolled in a teaching program, and have since graduated as a registered yoga teacher (RYT-200).

Community

Probably one of the most important things that I can recommend to *anyone*, suffering from *any chronic disease,* is developing a community.

A community can be many things. It could be having a network of family and friends that you can call or text when your pain is especially bad. These may be the people you ask for help, to bring you to doctor’s appointments when you cannot drive, to make you a meal when you cannot get out of bed, to simply listen when you need an ear. Or, they could just be that Facebook group of like-minded individuals who suffer from the same condition that you do, who you can ask questions and offer empathy. It could be both!

The Bottom Line…

My fellow migraineurs, this is what has worked for me. Of course, I take daily medications. I also take rescue medications when I need to. I sleep when the pain is bad enough. I lie on the couch more than I should. But I use these mechanisms on a regular basis.