When Migraine Pain Fuels Anger and Impatience

by BARBARA LEECH

Migraines and Anger

When the pain of a migraine sets in, I often find myself struggling to get through the day, longing for a dark, silent place to simply lay down, close my eyes and shut out the world.

I am no longer myself. It is difficult to have patience or act like am in a good mood. I feel grumpy and miserable and then I feel guilty for being that way. And much of the time, I must continue with work, driving and all my regular obligations, all of which can accelerate my migraine to the next level of pain and my grumpiness to zero tolerance.

I admit it; everyday challenges, situations, people, and noise get to me much easier when I am suffering from a migraine. Noise can actually make me angry – like I am so caught up in the pain I am in that I am actually mad at whoever is responsible for any unnecessary noise. It is the pain talking, but it is coming out of my mouth.

Noise that increases my pain can be anything from someone turning up the radio for their favorite song, to whistling a happy tune in the elevator. Whistling especially makes me lose my cool because it typically involves high-pitched notes that seem to strike the pain in me like a bolt of electricity and make me feel like my head might explode.

I have to watch what I say during these situations because whatever my response, it is coming from a place so desperate it feels like my life depends on making the extra noise stop. I probably don't have to tell you that I can come off sounding abrupt or angry to others as I plead for mercy.

People Without Migraines Don't Understand

I have found that most people who are not prone to migraines do not have a clear idea of the type of headache that we are dealing with. They simply think that migraines are much like the "bad headache" they occasionally get.

People have asked me why I am cranky and wearing my sunglasses on a cloudy day. They judge my mood, my conversation abilities and roll their eyes in a way that makes me feel like they are deeming me "overly dramatic."

But the fact is, I happen to be able to handle a high level of pain, have given birth to four children without taking anything for pain during labor and I suffer from lupus, which causes dramatic pain throughout my joints and entire body on a regular basis.

I am tough. So when I cannot hold down food because the migraine pain is so intense, it makes me angry to be told I am anything but strong.

What Not to Say to Someone With Migraines

There is also a lot of advice, some good, most of it not very helpful, and some downright irritating, that people without migraines feel the need to share. Here are a few things never to say to me or anyone with migraines:

My Aunt (Mother, Sister, Cousin) Changed Her Diet and Her Migraines Are Gone

I get it. You want to help. But honestly, I have tried avoiding certain foods and even have gone gluten-free, dairy-free and tried just about all the latest miracle diets out there.

The result was that none of it prevented my migraines. There are very specific migraine trigger foods that I avoid, but I am not about to drink all my meals in a magic shake only to learn weeks later it does not work.

Next page: more things not to say to someone with migraines, and managing your pain and resentment.

What Not to Say to Someone With Migraines

Just Toughen up and Ignore It. It Is Just a Headache

Sorry, but a migraine is not just a headache. Believe me, I know the difference since I have experienced both a typical headache and migraines. It is like comparing a brief summer rain shower to a hurricane.

If you have not had a headache debilitate you, make you seek complete darkness because light seems toxic to your level of pain and become physically sick and unable to hold down food because of it, you do not understand migraine pain. Simply say, "I don't know what you're going through, but I am so sorry."

Have You Tried Taking Anything for It?

Why yes, I have actually had the wisdom to take over the counter pain medication as well as prescription migraine medication. Sometimes these medications take the edge off, sometimes they do absolutely nothing to help.

My doctor has prescribed Imitrex, which will only treat a headache once it has already begun. It will not prevent my headaches or reduce their frequency. I also take Excedrin Migraine, but I find that usually, once the headache has begun, there is no stopping it.

You Should Exercise More

I probably should. However, it is hard to keep up with a routine between having lupus, which makes my joints and body hurt, and getting migraines, which makes it physically impossible to function safely on a treadmill.

I have a gym membership and use it as often as I feel up to it, and strangely it has not cured me from getting migraines.

Managing the Brain-Pain and Resentment

I realize that being subjected to this level of pain can affect my relationships and make me feel resentful. It can be hard on a beautiful sunny day to be the only one hiding in the dark and writhing from the pain that few actually understand. After a while my mood is simply one of resentment and feeling alone on an isolated island of misery.

It is important to take care of yourself during a really bad migraine attack. If you are able to rest, do so. Release the guilt about all that you should be doing. Realize that you are not alone, that many people feel as you do and understand your pain.

Part of my resentment is also with myself for needing to take time to recover. I have come to realize that I am less angry when I allow myself what is required to feel better.

Another important thing to do is try and educate others around you to what a migraine is and what it does to you. Encourage them to seek information about migraines from reputable sources.

Ask for help with tasks you simply cannot do while in the midst of an attack. Let go of your to-do list and keep only the must-do items.

When you feel emotionally a wreck from all the pain, try taking deep cleansing breaths, in through the nose, out through the mouth, and release the tension in your body before you react to the negative emotional build up inside of you.

Find something peaceful that you enjoy, to let go of the negative feelings and emotions that are left behind after a long migraine attack.

Finally, apologize if you feel you were abrupt or easily angered with someone while in the midst of your pain. Then, let go of any guilt and realize you are doing the best you can.