I’m Not Unreliable — My Lupus Is

by SHARNAE SMITH

When Lupus Turns You Into “The Unreliable Friend”

Raise your hands if you're finding it more difficult to keep promises you've made to your friends!

You promised you'd be a bridesmaid in your friend's wedding or that you’d go to brunch this Saturday, and although you intend to follow through with these promises, the impact of your health deters you from keeping them.

It's overwhelming that I've become that "unreliable friend," and it's gotten so bad that now my friends won't even bother asking me to hang out with them anymore.

If this is you too, don't feel guilty! You're not alone. I've always been the type friend who attended all the life-changing events and was wide awake on the phone in the middle of the night giving advice for all the drama my friends were going through.

Now, it seems as though I'm struggling to not cancel at the last minute. I barely have the energy to answer the phone sometimes. It's becoming a chore to have regular conversations with my "healthy" friends who have regular social lives.

Lupus is a chronic illness that is not predictable, and all the planning and organizing you may do can’t stop a flare-up from happening at the worst time, causing you to forgo any social plans you had scheduled.

You may feel as though you're losing your friendships over something that is out of your control, however there are a few things you can do:

Keep Your Current Friends Informed

Having someone to rely on and open up to is crucial, considering how much emotional support is needed while fighting lupus.

The best way to keep your relationships with your friends strong is to be honest — even about the things you might find uncomfortable to share.

I’ve hidden certain things about what I’m going through from my friends before, and they got really upset when they found out. We care about our friends so much and we hate to have them worry about us, so we hide certain things to protect them; but truthfully, hiding our experience is only pushing them further away.

Most of my friends want to understand the impact that lupus has on my life, and yours probably do, too. Opening up and keeping them informed brings you closer together. You’re giving them the option to show you who they really are, and how they’ll react during the times that you need them most.

Learn to Let Go

It's hard to accept but it's true. You'll have people in your life who just won't understand your situation, even friends you've known for years. With these people, your best bet is to let them go.

You're already dealing with enough, so stressing out over your friendships should not be one of them. Friends who truly care about you and your health will be supportive, attentive, and appreciative.

You have to have a support system that understands you're not trying to be "unreliable" or "anti-social" — your intentions are good, your health just isn't. Letting go is not easy, and can often leave you feeling lonely and isolated. But you don't have to feel that way with a chronic illness.

Find Comfort in Support Groups

In my years of having lupus, I have found it quite satisfying to join local and online support groups. Who better to understand what you're going through than someone who is also going through it?

I have plenty of friends from all over the world who'll send me emails, cards, and gifts to encourage me. Although many of them are long distance, these relationships are comforting. I can discuss issues with these friends that others may not understand.

For instance, I remember needing advice on a particular issue I was facing with my health. I logged on and asked the question in a chat room and immediately connected with thousands of people who shared their stories and ways I could feel better.

If you're not an online person and would rather talk to someone face to face, there are hundreds of cities that provide lupus support groups under the Lupus Foundation of America. You've got to think outside the box and reach out to such organizations and build relationships.

Conclusion

Truth is, maintaining a friendship takes two. You can't put all the pressure on yourself to maintain your relationship with your friends. In many cases, you'll just have to establish a "circle of trust" with those who are willing to research lupus, understand the impact it will have on you, and just be there for you.

You'll win some and you'll lose some, but remember that you're not "unreliable" — your health is.