Are There Positive Aspects of Lupus?

by ANNA SCANLON

Three Positive Aspects of Lupus

To be completely frank, there aren't many positive aspects of lupus. It takes away much more than it gives, particularly if you are someone who struggles with symptoms on a daily basis.

However, it is important to always look on the bright side of things and stay positive — so I've compiled a list of the few bright spots that exist in living with SLE.

Say Goodbye to Fake Friends

Lupus often acts like a crucible, particularly when you are diagnosed and first began to experience a ton of strange symptoms. Some people will get upset with you and accuse you of faking or exaggerating, especially if you struggle for months or years to get an accurate diagnosis.

But in a way, this can be a good thing in disguise.

As people leave you because they are "tired" of your disease, you find that the good and genuine friends stay and are people who you can always rely on. Your friends may not all be lifelong, but at least they will be longer lasting.

Everyone has fake friends or people who don't really care about them beyond what they can get out of them, or people who won't be there with the going gets tough. But when you have lupus, you find this out a lot quicker and often aren't as invested in these friendships by the time you find out what kind of people your "friends" really are.

In a way, it saves a lot of heartbreak and frustration down the line.

Because of past experiences with people who don't understand lupus or don't respect me (i.e. people who aggressively push particular diets on me, suggest that perhaps I'm faking my disease for attention, etc.), I have very little time for people who are quite obviously fake or won't go to the same lengths for me that I will for them.

If it becomes clear early in the friendship that the person won't be there for me the same way I lay it out for my friends, I usually have no problems cutting ties. Luckily, because of some less-than-pleasant experiences in college, I am pretty adept at separating the wheat from the chaff.

Be aware, though, that separating your fake friends from your true friends is an art and doesn't mean that your friends aren't human. Every now and then, people will flake or forget about a time you were supposed to meet — that is totally normal and it is extreme to start chopping people from your life for that.

One big way I tend to judge friendships is to put myself in that person's shoes. I think about what I would be realistically willing to do for them given our level of friendship. It can be different for each person.

For new friends, it can simply mean replying to texts and calls in a timely manner and respecting my time or that I may have to flake due to illness. For old friends (whom I, thankfully, have rarely — if ever — had to cut out of my life) it can mean things like visiting at the hospital or dropping a note or well wishes when I am ill if they are far away. These are things I would realistically do for them, so it is reasonable to expect it in return.

Dating and Relationships

No matter how attractive you are, dating someone with lupus is bound to be difficult for your partner. However, along the same vein as your friends, you will find that your romantic partners are more genuine, stand up people as well.

This is particularly true if you began dating the person post-diagnosis or your current partner has stood by you through tons of medical ups and downs. It takes a strong person to be in a relationship with someone who is constantly affected by lupus, and you can rest assured that your partner loves you for you and sees something extra special in you.

This can feel pretty good. Previously, I had a partner leave me when the beginnings of my lupus became too much for him. However, my current partner began to date me after I was totally aware of the diagnosis.

He has stuck with me through so much, including several hospitalizations (and came to visit me every day in the hospital). This isn't something I take lightly and I know he's a keeper.

Job Freedom

This may not apply to everyone who has lupus, but it has definitely been part of my experience with the disease. For some people, lupus can take away their dreams entirely (or in some cases, just not affect them and they can continue on as normal).

I found that I was unable to work 9-5, but have been spending time saving and carving out a niche for myself that allows me to work from home.

For my personality, I don't think I would have been very happy in a 9-5 environment, as I do relish having my own work schedule — and it is great to be able to get assignments about lupus. I was also able to find a creative way to complete my PhD so I could fulfil one of my dreams of becoming a doctor of history.

To be completely honest, I'm not sure I would have had the courage to do something like this had I been able to secure a 9-5 job and settle into a career earlier. Or perhaps I would have done my PhD in the United States instead of going abroad to do it (where it is quicker, cheaper and just as regarded).

Although I may never have the job security that many people enjoy, I know I will be personally fulfilled and I won't run the risk of being fired for absences or tardiness. Having lupus gave me the courage to pursue some of my dreams, and hopefully will give some of you the guts to do so as well. Sometimes with lupus you have nothing to lose, so it isn't a great risk.

There aren't many positives to having lupus, but focusing on them will help you to have a greater outlook on life and keep you from feeling too sorry for yourself. Lupus already sucks enough as it is!