Tips for Handling Lupus Mood Swings

by BARBARA LEECH

How to Deal With Lupus Mood Swings

There are many moments when we with lupus wish for simple, precious things: less pain, more energy, all organs functioning as they should, or a decent night's sleep. Sometimes, these things appear out of nowhere to offer us peace.

Those moments for most of us are few and far between. In these rare hours of feeling, dare I say normal again, I return to the woman I once knew. The mood swings I have been stuck riding for years halt for a brief respite.

As a member of many lupus support groups and a writer for *New Life Outlook*, I have had many of fellow lupus survivors bring up the fact that they have mood swings and it impacts their life, their family and their other relationships. Typically, the mood changes were first noted around the time symptoms of their disease first appeared.

So, there is good news if you experience moods swings: you are not alone. The question is why do they occur and what can you do about it?

Who Is Pushing the Swing?

Sometimes I can be sitting on the floor playing with Lego with my sons and suddenly I feel my mood shifting to the darker side, a side where I am annoyed at every little thing.

I look around the living room and see a billion Lego pieces on the floor and think about the arguments that are about to take place regarding cleaning up, and my mood quickly shifts to agitation. Sadly, I am ready for an argument before one even begins, and I become a snippy, annoyed shell of a human being.

Often, I attribute this to mood swings, but I believe it may also be from the frustration of not being able to do what I used to do.

I can't sit on the floor without pain. I can't pull small Lego pieces apart when my youngest asks for help doing so. I can't attend every baseball practice because it is 40 degrees out and that will cause horrible joint pain, and Raynaud's Syndrome (which accompanies lupus for many of us warriors) will turn my hands, feet and nose numb — yet burning like they are on fire.

The list is endless, but you get the gist. There is loss and pain wherever I turn.

Helpless and Angry

Though it is true that medications prescribed for lupus — steroids in particular — can trigger changes in mood, and the disease itself can actually attack the brain, there is more to lupus mood issues.

We are angry. We feel helpless at times and at the mercy of our disease. We built a good life and our disease keeps appearing and knocking it down.

Some of us don't even get that occasional respite where, for a brief moment, we feel normal again. We have reasons to feel helpless and angry at times.

We hear so much today about positive thought, and I agree it can impact how you face your challenges. But we must not forget to allow ourselves to have human feelings and work through the grief that comes with losing an important part of who you once were.

Ignoring it only leads to more mood swings because, essentially, you are in denial. You are repressing the grief and anger you feel at being denied health, activities you once loved, and even being the parent you wish to be.

Next page: how to slow down lupus mood swings once they hit.

How to Slow the Mood Swings

It is great to be strong and chant a positive mantra about how lupus does not have you, but it ignores the feelings you have about what this disease has taken from you. Strength is not found in denying anything has happened, but rather that you have survived it and are fighting against this enemy.

You are strong despite lupus, not because it does not impact your life. Here are some ways to shut down these mood swings when they occur:

Say, for example, you're going on your annual family trip to the lake. You pack everything for everybody, and you organize once you get there. You make beds, dinner and fetch swimsuits and sunscreen. Everyone is having fun — except you. Lupus makes you feel like you might curl up into a ball of pain and never move again.

What to Do

- **Halt the mood swing here**. Allow yourself to feel angry or even grief at the loss of what should be a fun adventure for you. It is not fair that others are having a blast and lupus has kicked your — well, you know.
- **Take a few moments to think through the emotions you are feeling**. Talk about what you are feeling (grief, annoyance, anger) out loud, even if it is just to yourself. It is important to find a moment alone and put those feeling out there, verbally. It acknowledges your emotions so you can let them go, at least a little, and mood swings usually slow when your emotions are acknowledged.
- **Make a list of everything that you want to do, but can't**. Putting it down on paper helps to get what you are holding onto inside (anger, frustration or sadness) out of you. It is the opposite of what we are told to do (be positive and cram your feelings down deep inside of you).
- **Find small ways to triumph over it**. Now that you have thought through and processed the feelings if injustice, pain, grief and frustration that comes with everything lupus has robbed you of, look at what you *can* do. Focus on the good that still remains. There is always good, you just may have to look deeper than others. Yes, this is looking and focusing on the positive, but it is done with respect, after all the other emotions have been acknowledged, so now it actually works.

What If the Mood Swings Remain?

Working through your feelings and losses will not "cure" you of mood swings. You are human. There are other things influencing your mood, like medications and the actual disease itself attacking the systems of your body. But you can help avoid some of the mood issues and maybe take action when you feel a big swing coming on:

- If you feel your mood changing, think about why. Are you in pain? Is that pain increasing? Is there something you can do to help ease it or stop it from getting worse? Take something for the pain, remove yourself from the sun, cold, wind, standing too long, sitting too long — whatever might aggravate the pain

further.

- If you are depressed, have you sought help? Talk to your doctor, who can connect you to resources to help deal with these feelings.
- Eat balanced, healthy meals — and don’t skip eating. Mood can be directly associated with hunger and sugar levels being off because of skipped meals.
- Focus on you. That’s right, you deserve it. Do something you love when your mood is swinging to sadness or anger. Sometimes simply changing our focus for an hour can make all the difference.

Finally, think about the fact that you are not alone in all of this. Stay active with lupus support groups and chat online with fellow survivors. There is peace in knowing that others feel exactly as you do.