Tips for Keeping a Positive Outlook Despite Lupus

by ELENA ANCIRO

Staying Positive With Lupus

When you live with a chronic illness, jumping on the positivity train is definitely a challenge — especially when you are still in the midst of accepting your diagnosis. It's normal to feel frustrated and sad, but if we allow ourselves to stay in a negative state, lupus symptoms are more likely to be activated by the resulting stress.

When I was diagnosed with lupus, daily tasks once done with casual ease were rendered impossible as physical and emotional pain invaded all aspects of the life I once knew. I was consumed with the fear that nothing would ever be the same again.

I was in mourning for the life I thought I would have, and took no comfort in the encouraging words of others. "Look on the bright side" was definitely the last thing I wanted to hear.

But staying positive with lupus is not about being happy all the time; it's about achieving a healthy balance between being realistic and choosing to interpret a situation in the best light.

Reaping the health benefits of a positive outlook doesn't happen overnight — it's something we all work on every day throughout our lives. If you're ready to turn your lemons into lemonade, the following suggestions could be your first steps towards a brighter view of your lupus world.

Health Benefits

According to *Harvard Health Publications*, studies have shown pessimists are three times more likely than optimists to have heart attacks, have higher blood pressure, and are more likely to develop viral symptoms. Another study found that the most pessimistic individuals had a 42 percent higher rate of death than the most optimistic, proving that optimism improves overall health and longevity.

Find Your Positive Squad

Constantly negative people are like black holes; they suck the life out of a room and, inevitably, out of you. People with lupus have to conserve their energy, so it's important to surround yourself with individuals who do not drain you.

Be conscious of how your feel around certain people. Make a mental note of people you need to limit time with and, if necessary, cease contact with toxic individuals.

Create your own "positive squad," which could include friends, family, your online lupus family, and/or a neutral individual like a counselor, psychologist or wellness coach.

Remember, the people in your life should uplift and inspire you, not drag you deeper into sadness or despair.

Having a positive squad by your side is a huge factor in helping you maintain an optimistic outlook on your life with lupus.

Positive Reminders

Reading positive quotes is a strategy that has worked well for me in my search for optimism. Depending on how I am feeling, I search for inspiring quotes and pictures to put on my computer desktop or on my cell phone lock screen.

I look at my desktop and phone several times a day, so it is an easy and simple way to redirect negative thinking on a regular basis. If you prefer positive reminders without the technology, you can put up sticky notes or buy a white board for your fridge.

Let Gratitude Ground You

When life is chaotic and your health is unstable, finding things to be grateful for can be a huge challenge. A gratitude board is a great, creative way to express what you are thankful for when you aren't able to find the words during moments of stress.

A gratitude board is a vision board about the people, experiences and things in your life you are thankful for. It's as simple as buying a poster board or corkboard and pasting/ pinning visual examples that represent your gratitude.

Try to include the positive things that have come out of having lupus:

- What have you discovered about yourself?
- Do you take care of yourself better now?
- Has it strengthened your relationships?
- Has it led you to new interests?

Healthy Distraction

We all have bad days, but the key is not to linger in that negative space for too long. Here are three examples of healthy distractions that could help lift you out of a slump:

- Take a walk to clear your head or put on your favorite music and have a dance party in your living room (even if you're just tapping your toes).
- Escape into a book, a movie, a play, or your favorite television series.
- Do something kind for someone else.

Goal Setting

Goals and dreams are definitely affected by a lupus diagnosis. To those who have been able to cultivate a positive outlook, this new reality does not necessarily mean certain aspirations are hopeless.

Old goals need to be looked at with new eyes. Most often, aspects of an old goal can still be achievable, but need to be on a longer timeline.

It's important to have something to look forward to and to work towards, whether it is a goal like finishing a degree or walking one block without stopping to rest. As a starting point, identify a goal you have written off as impossible due to lupus and see if you can find one part of that goal, or something closely associated to that goal, you could still achieve.

Second, set one realistic, daily goal you can accomplish when you get up in the morning. For example, drinking a

certain amount of water a day, reading five pages of a book, or making it to yoga class.

Working towards a goal you are passionate about and feeling a sense of daily accomplishment are essential elements to creating a positive outlook. It also reminds us that there is much more to us than the disease we have.

The Power of Acceptance

One of my favorite quotes was said by Epictetus: “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.” We can control how we view, accept, and respond to any circumstance including a life affected by lupus.

By choosing a positive outlook, we enhance our physical and mental health, and start to take that important step of fully accepting the changes we need to make to live well with lupus. And it’s with that acceptance we can start bringing joy and hope back into our lives.