

## DEALING WITH INSECURITY

One of the biggest challenges in dealing with a serious chronic illness is the almost constant feeling that you can't assess what's around the corner, when the next certainty will disappear, when you'll have to deal with a new problem or item. This piercing feeling of unpredictability can give people who have ALS the feeling that it's difficult, if not impossible to make plans for the future, travel plans or simply to relax. Dealing with insecurity is enervating.



Actually some researchers have come to the conclusion that insecurity can have a bigger effect than bad news. Sarah Burgard, for example, assistant-professor at Michigan University, has researched how unemployment insecurity affects health. She researched about 3,000 people under the age of 60, and divided them

into a group which was concerned about keeping their job and a group that wasn't concerned. Burgard found out that those who felt chronically insecure about their job generally described their health as worse than those who actually lost their jobs or even had to deal with a serious or life threatening illness.

Most of us underestimate our power to deal with a difficult situation, says Robert Leahy, clinical professor psychology at the Weill-Cornell University Medical College, New York-Presbyterian Hospital. He's written a book with the title "The Worry Cure", and states in here that the trick is 'productive worrying'. He defines it as seeing what you can do about a situation within the next 24 hours.

Leahy warns that people who are already worried tend to overestimate negative information, something that can be called 'confirmation bias'. Others recommend that real worries would be dealt with in detail, by looking up as much information as possible.

But no matter how much research you do or whether you take specific steps or not, there is still a lot left that's out of your control and which is relatively unpredictable, more so if you're dealing with a serious chronic illness. Here are a few tips:

- Learn to meditate and relax. There are different approaches to this and depending on your interest and possibilities you can experiment a little. Some require the capability to slowly breathe in and out, while others emphasize on clearing your mind of all thoughts or to focus on a single word or sound. It comes down to teaching your body to weaken its "fight or flight" reaction, which strengthens fear or aggression.
- Get in touch with other people. Whether it's about family or friends, neighbors, online chat rooms about subjects you're interested in, a profession group or religious community, talking to people in real life or online will keep your interests alive and nourish them.
- Take action wherever possible. Even little things can make a difference. If you're worried about possibly losing your mobility, look for available solutions and resources now, before you need them. If you're having health problems, look for a professional with whom you can talk about your worries. Put energy into preventing problems or prepare yourself to efficiently deal with them when they arise.
- Make plans. Of course the situation can change. But simply thinking about things you want to do and planning them is important. Naturally you need to remain realistic about what's possible concerning your situation, both physically and financially. But keep doing things, within your limits, that will bring joy to you and the people you love.

Sources:

- The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You, by Robert L. Leahy, 2006.
- One Less Thing to Worry About: Uncommon Wisdom for Coping with Common Anxieties, by Jerilyn Ross and Robin Cantor-Cooke, 2009.

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