

Forget Fibromyalgia

Rebecca Richmond

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Dedication

For my amazing and ever-supportive husband
and wonderful daughter.

Thank you both for your love and support –
which I hope I am able to repay one day.

Acknowledgements

There are far too many to list, but I am particularly grateful to so many people in the field of personal development and the understanding of the mind–body connection, NLP and hypnosis.

Also, Claire Pickering – my wonderful editor and friend.

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Foreword

When I developed fibromyalgia my life fell apart – I know many of you reading this book will know what that feels like and how it can devastate people's lives from personal experience. But what may surprise you is that I am now grateful that I developed it.

I know that sounds crazy, but in discovering how to recover from my condition so that I can now live a full and active life again I embarked on a journey that transformed the way I think and behave. I learnt to use the immense power of the unconscious mind to enhance the way I think and to improve every area of my life. I have been able to use the skills and techniques I acquired to develop an amazingly rewarding career as a coach helping other people transform their lives. It has been such a great privilege to help my clients recover from trauma, improve their health, careers, and relationships and, most importantly, find long-lasting happiness. Perhaps the greatest gift of all is that I firmly believe that developing a deep understanding of my body saved my life.

It is my belief that the techniques I learnt aided my recovery from surgery to remove a pancreatic tumour and that my ability to understand and consciously connect with my body was directly responsible for the early diagnosis of my malignant melanoma.

☺ I gave a lot of consideration as to whether writing this book would have an effect on my own health because it meant reconnecting with my condition at the deepest level and re-examining all my symptoms. The good news is it didn't and I'm still fit and well.

It is not intended as a guidebook or an instruction manual. It is simply my journey to recovery in which I have shared with you the techniques I used to aid my recovery. This book is designed to share with you my understanding that fibromyalgia is not something that just happens. It is my belief that it is our body's way of telling you that you need to take action in some area of your life.

My life began to change when someone made me realise that the events of my life or, more importantly, my reaction to those events had impacted on my body. I will never forget what she said. 'You have been through so much, you have rationalised everything and carried on. Frankly, most people would have had a nervous breakdown. Even though you have coped, all that stress and negative emotions has to have had an effect and it is your body's way of telling you it's had enough!'

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I'm committed to helping people with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) gain emotional wellness and overcome their symptoms, taking one day at a time. My greatest wish is that you discover how to have a life filled with confidence, joy and vibrant good health.

This book is for people who understand or have an open mind to the idea that our minds can have an effect on our well-being. That doesn't mean that fibromyalgia is an imagined illness – it is very real.

I felt compelled to write this book. I was motivated by the desperation and hopelessness of a group of sufferers and their families who firmly believed that there was no hope of them recovering and that anyone who claimed to have recovered had either never been ill in the first place or worse was a charlatan who was intending to prey on their vulnerability.

I am well aware that reading a book cannot compare with the advantages of working with a great coach, but I do sincerely know that this book will inspire you to make changes in your own thinking and begin your own journey to recovery.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting an amazing lady who leads a group of sufferers in their search for a cure. She told me that that I am one of only a handful of sufferers in the world who has developed their own system to recover from fibromyalgia – it is this system I will share with you in this book.

For obvious reasons I am unable logistically to work personally with the millions of sufferers around the world and I will be still writing this book when I'm ninety if I try to explain everything I have learnt about the power of the mind on my journey to recovery, so I have put together simple techniques that I used to help me recover that you can do at home. If you wish to learn more about my coaching methods and products, please visit my website at <www.forgetfibromyalgia.com>.

Legal Disclaimer

By purchasing and reading this book you agree that you understand that the author is an individual diagnosed with fibromyalgia and CFS ten years ago and that now she has successfully recovered, she wants to share her journey to recovery with you.

You understand that she is not a doctor, licensed medical practitioner, nutritionist, dietitian or trained to advise on exercise and diet. The author is not suggesting that you use the information in this book as a substitute for professional or medical advice and she is by no means telling you what to do. This is merely what *she* did to recover. Therefore, you accept that she is not suggesting you change your diet either by adding or subtracting foods and/or liquids.

The author is not implying or suggesting that you stop taking any prescribed medication. Indeed, she strongly recommends that you check with your medical specialist to whom you have been referred before making amendments to your diet or undertaking an exercise plan or alternative, complementary therapies.

This book is not intended to diagnose or treat any ailments and the author is not attempting to prescribe medical treatment or cures for fibromyalgia or any other immune-related illnesses.

This book is for information purposes only and reflects her personal journey through fibromyalgia and her personal beliefs. By adopting, imitating or following any of the processes described by the author you are doing so of your own accord and at your own risk.

The author strongly recommends that you obtain a professional diagnosis from a qualified doctor. The symptoms of fibromyalgia can be similar to those of other illnesses and therefore it may be necessary for you to undergo tests to eliminate the possibility that you are suffering from one of these illnesses.

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Overview of Fibromyalgia

*To get through the hardest journey we need take only one step at a time,
but we must keep on stepping*

Chinese proverb

☺ This is the boring bit and you may already know more about fibromyalgia than you want to – so feel free to skip ahead to my fibromyalgia journey.

Definition of Fibromyalgia¹

Fibromyalgia, also called fibromyalgia syndrome, is a chronic, long-term condition that causes all-over pain of the body and it is a syndrome rather than a disease. The name fibromyalgia comes from the Latin term:

- ‘*fibro*’, meaning fibrous tissues – such as tendons (bands of tissue that connect muscles to bones) and ligaments (bands of tissue that connect bones to bones)

And the Greek names:

- ‘*my*’, meaning muscles, and
- ‘*algia*’, meaning pain

Fibromyalgia is called a ‘syndrome’ because it is a collection of symptoms, rather than a disease. It is an illness which involves both the mind and body. It is not arthritis, because it does not affect the joints. But like arthritis, it causes pain and fatigue or severe tiredness.

Fibromyalgia used to be known as fibrositis, which literally means inflammation (swelling) of the muscles and soft, fibrous connective tissue, typically affecting the back and causing stiffness and pain. However, the condition was renamed fibromyalgia after studies found that in fact there is no inflammation.

About Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a chronic rheumatic condition characterised by muscular or musculoskeletal pains with stiffness and localised tenderness at specific points on the body. It is recognised that people with certain rheumatic diseases are more likely to have fibromyalgia. The pain tends to be felt as widespread aching or burning, often described as being all over the body, with even gentle touch causing pain that can last for days. There may be flare-ups where it is

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worse at some times than others, and it may also change location, often becoming more severe in parts of the body such as legs, neck and arms.

The fatigue ranges from acute tiredness to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness. It may come and go and people can suddenly feel totally overwhelmed by exhaustion within minutes where they are drained of all energy – as if someone has just ‘switched the power off’. There is a wide variation in the level of pain and fatigue experienced by sufferers and while there is no reason to believe that all sufferers will deteriorate, most people find that at some time or other they are prevented from doing normal activities such as walking up stairs, shopping or housework.

Symptoms can be aggravated by totally unrelated illnesses, including hormone changes in women especially around the menstrual cycle, changes in the weather and also stress. Symptoms can be similar to those of CFS or myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). Some people believe the two conditions are the same, but in actual fact symptoms vary and fibromyalgia sufferers can experience strongly disabling chronic pain.

It is estimated that fibromyalgia may affect up to 4.5 per cent of the population across the globe. Anyone can develop fibromyalgia and it is estimated that between 70 and 90 per cent of sufferers are women. In most cases, fibromyalgia occurs between the ages of 30 and 60, usually developing between the ages of 25 and 55. It is not common in younger adults and children are rarely affected, but it can develop in people of any age, including children and the elderly.

What Causes Fibromyalgia?

The *cause* of fibromyalgia is *unknown*. However, researchers have several theories about causes or triggers of the disorder, some of which include:

- an injury or repetitive injuries that have affected the central nervous system.
- genetic predisposition – there is evidence to suggest that the genetic factors may play a role in the development of Fibromyalgia; however, research remains inconclusive at the point of writing this text.
- a traumatic event such as a divorce, an accident or a death in the family.
- suffering from depression or having a sustained period of stress – it has been suggested that fibromyalgia may result from stress-induced changes to the function and integrity of areas of the brain that control basic emotions such as fear, pleasure and anger.

☺ My *many* bruises after walking into door frames was testimony to this – and no I'm not just a klutz!

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This area of the brain is extremely vulnerable to stress as it is thought to be the centre of emotion, memory and the autonomic nervous system.

- a physically or emotionally stressful or traumatic event.
- an illness or infectious agent such as a virus in susceptible people.

The cause maybe unknown and perhaps it occurs for no reason, but the pain and suffering are very real and can cause a great deal of distress to both sufferers and their families.

Most Common Symptoms

It is thought that people with fibromyalgia are unable to obtain the deep, restorative sleep our bodies need. This leads to a cycle of fatigue and pain. Someone suffering from the condition usually experiences aches all over the body, although there will be certain areas where the pain is more localised, as I have already stated. Some of the main symptoms are:

- pain
- fatigue
- sleep disturbance and waking up feeling exhausted
- morning stiffness
- headaches
- concentration problems – ‘fibro fog’
- irritable bowel syndrome
- painful menstrual periods
- restless legs syndrome, where legs are uncomfortable and twitchy, especially at night
- poor circulation, with tingling or swelling of the hands and feet
- an urgent need to urinate

Feeling tired a lot of the time can make it hard to carry out simple everyday tasks such as housework or going to work. This can lead to frustration and depression.

Fibromyalgia is an invisible illness, which can mean people do not understand how bad you are feeling – and that can make you feel even more despondent or discouraged and exasperated.

Diagnosis

It is difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are so similar to those of other illnesses and so therefore it can take a considerable amount of time before an accurate diagnosis may be given, usually following a process of elimination.

No standard medical test or X-ray can provide a definitive diagnosis of fibromyalgia. People with fibromyalgia have tender points in certain parts of the body which a doctor will assess to try to make a diagnosis based on the symptoms. Often, they will use the American

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College of Rheumatology's 1990 criteria for classifying fibromyalgia. According to these criteria, a person is considered to have fibromyalgia if he or she experiences widespread pain (occurring on the left and right side of the body) for at least three months in combination with tenderness in at least eleven of eighteen specific tender-point sites.

You should *always* seek medical advice and *obtain a diagnosis from your medical practitioner* to rule out any other conditions exhibiting similar symptoms. The information contained within this book is for *general purposes only*.

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My Fibromyalgia Journey

Out of something bad comes something good

Proverb

This story has a happy outcome. It is not about my life in general but I think it may help you to know a bit about my personal story and what I did to recover.

☺ By nature I am a very private person, so it has been hard for me to share the details, but I feel it is important for you to understand my journey.

If I can just help one of you to achieve something beneficial from fibromyalgia it will be worth it.

I am a really happy, positive person by nature but there have been some very low points on my journey. To help keep you cheerful I will incorporate a positive paragraph or two to encourage you to read on to the really important part of the book, where *you* can do something about changing your lot. In fact, if at any stage of reading my story you feel too down or, more importantly, are getting distressed about events in your life – please stop reading this chapter and go to the next chapter. That’s where I start to share my methods, in a positive light, for controlling and living with fibromyalgia.

Rebecca’s Story

My childhood was both difficult and traumatic, suffering poverty and abuse. With good reason, I was often scared and worried, but I was raised to just get on with things and not to feel sorry for myself – no matter how bad things got. I learnt to cope with whatever life brought my way, kept quiet about it and considered myself lucky! I distinctly remember that whenever I got overtired or distressed, my legs would ache and at the time I was told it was just growing pains. I can’t be sure that it was connected to my fibromyalgia, but research suggests that this type of childhood pain could be the early onset of the condition.

From the day I left school at sixteen I was determined to escape from poverty and create a better life for myself. I worked very long hours and attended college in the evenings. It was not uncommon for me to work over seventy hours per week.

I successfully passed all my professional exams with distinction and embarked on my career. Although it was a fantastic and financially rewarding career, it came with a dark side: heaps of stress and anxiety on top of all my childhood issues that were still locked away in the cupboard of my mind.

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My twenties and thirties were an intense medley of work, tension and trauma. I would wake up every day feeling happy for the first few seconds and then worry would overwhelm me as I recalled the reality of my life. I would feel physically sick and whilst it was a situation of my own making, as is often the case with people who have problems, I felt completely trapped. I pressed on just dealing with things and getting on with my life, without seeking professional help and feeling completely isolated. Rarely did I relax. I was constantly so stressed out that I had pains in my chest – but still I just kept on going.

Most days I was so tired I would go to bed at 9.00 p.m. so I could cope with the demands of the next day. Sleep gave me the advantage of being able to escape through dreaming, enabling me to feel good, releasing me from the life I had created for myself. During this time I suffered from occasional bouts of pain in my arms and legs, but guess what? – I just ignored them.

Throughout this period of my life I had incredibly low self-esteem and I disliked myself immensely. No matter how much success I achieved, it did nothing to increase my feelings of self-worth and I became despondent.

☺ Smile – we are getting to a good bit. Please note here that for the first time in my life I am taking responsibility for how I have arrived at this point. This is a key strategy for dealing with the stuff that triggers attacks of fibromyalgia, but more on this later.

I had married at twenty but it soon became apparent that we were not right for each other, both being completely unable to meet the other's needs. Then in 1992 my daughter was born (I told you we were getting to a good bit). So now there was another person to worry about – but what a person! What wouldn't I do for my adorable daughter? To touch her tiny hand, to look into her rich brown eyes, to hear her gurgle and then the clincher – her tiny laugh that made my life complete.

When I was with her things were great and I wanted to be with her every moment of every day. But like most people I couldn't because it was my career that provided the essentials in life. Very soon I resented my career because it stopped me from being with my daughter. But at the same time I knew it was a necessary evil if I was to avoid putting her through the poverty I had experienced in my own childhood. I felt I was letting her down. She was so innocent and made me so happy and yet I wasn't there for her. How do you explain to a child that mummy loves her but that she can't be with her today?

The final blow was when I realised my marriage was finally over. So now it was just me and my baby ... only by now I had a complete lack of energy and experienced frequent fibromyalgia attacks. Now, I had different stresses to contend with. I had escaped an

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unhappy marriage but was now a single working mum on a full-time basis. Thankfully, I earned good money, although it was still a challenge holding everything together and I was exhausted. In many ways I had a lot to be thankful for; indeed, more than most. But there was only one thing I really wanted: to be a full-time mum and to make sure that my daughter had a better childhood than I had.

Her childminder was an amazing person (one of my sisters) and whilst I knew that she was getting all the love and attention she needed, I had this strong urge inside me to be with her – she was the only important thing in my life. She was my ‘rose’ and I wanted to be the most important person in her life and for her to share every moment with me. Every day it hurt knowing I couldn’t be with her and the pain in my limbs increasingly debilitated me.

Somehow, I managed to get through the days and even advance my career. I would enjoy and relish precious moments with my daughter before going to work and again in the evening. She would be bathed and in bed, having been read a story, by 7.00 p.m. each night. When she was asleep I was left alone to brood over the pains and stresses in my life and I would be in bed before 8.00 p.m. most nights. I was so stressed out that even though I was exhausted, sleep eluded me. I would lie there praying for help to be a good mum, agonising over what I could do to resolve my issues. Hours later I would slip into a fitful sleep, waking feeling like I had not been to sleep at all.

In 1996 I finally got my life on track when I married my second husband. Life was definitely better and I felt happier and more secure than ever. There was still plenty of stress in my hectic and rapidly progressing career, which meant living life at a fast pace. Coping with a career, and being a wife, mum and step mum while my husband worked away during the week was not easy. I also had the added stress of helping my husband deal with the aftermath of his divorce – and with it a lack of money and other external factors that threatened our happiness. Fortunately, we were both totally focused on loving each other and protecting our children. No matter what was thrown at us, no matter how much pain it caused us, we always put the needs of the children first, even if it meant more pain or difficulties for us.

☺ For the first time in my life I felt loved and that I was a worthwhile person. I actually realised that there was no reason to hate myself.

With a large family of two adults and five children, including my stepchildren, it was a struggle to maintain a work/life balance. Whilst my husband worked hard to provide for us all, we still needed two incomes, as is the case with most families these days.

Despite focusing all my attention on my daughter when I was home I still felt guilty that I could not be there for her *all* the time. And even though I would work when she was in bed to

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keep on top of my workload, I felt guilty that I was not giving enough attention to my job. I didn't seem to be able to do either justice.

My fibromyalgia finally become overwhelming and incapacitating in 1999. I had been diagnosed with osteoarthritis in my hands, which was incredibly painful and becoming increasingly so. Apparently, I was about ten years too young to have developed it. Then I went through a period of approximately four months when I kept thinking I had the flu but without all of the symptoms. I was constantly exhausted and I ached all over. Then it would go away for a few weeks, only to return worse than ever.

Strangely, whenever I did relax properly, for example at weekends or at Christmas, I felt really ill. I would come in from work and practically collapse. I was desperate to spend time with my daughter, but often this would mean lying on the couch together watching a Disney movie while I struggled to stay awake.

☺ I came up with what I thought was a great idea to help me relax – I took sugar craft classes once a week and went with my sister. We did have a good laugh but guess what, it ended up being stressful because we took professional exams and I would be up at 5.00 a.m. icing cakes before my daughter got up. Are you beginning to get the impression I was not great at relaxing!

My symptoms became progressively worse. The attacks lasted longer, they were more severe and they became more and more frequent. I have always been very fit - I joined my first gym at sixteen, so exercise has always been an important part of my life. But by the year 2000 things had got so bad that I could barely move. I was a member of a fitness club at the time.

☺ My daughter would come with me. She loved her special classes and we would swim together after our workout. She loved sitting on my back while I swam around the pool as her personal dolphin.

The changing rooms were on the ground floor but the gym was on the first floor and eventually I could not even get up the stairs, never mind exercise. By this time the pain was incessant and I had all the symptoms at least five days of every week. I had a company car yet I did not feel safe enough to drive to work, so I arranged for someone to collect me.

The only way I could get up a flight of stairs was on my hands and knees. If I was out in public and there was no lift, my husband would have to support me. By this stage I rarely

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went out alone, which was extremely limiting for one normally so active and driven, who was used to doing things for herself.

We were committed to providing for all our children and were determined to make sure they had a great time whenever we were together at weekends, when I would force myself to find the energy to be there for them and to join in. Looking back, I think I must have been constantly running on adrenaline, because as soon as I relaxed I felt like I had been hit by a truck. I still worked in a very stressful environment and would arrive at work feeling like I was about to collapse, but within an hour the adrenaline would kick in and I could just about manage to cope again. The pain never completely disappeared and I would limp around a bit like the hero in an action movie, but at least I would make it through the day.

At this stage not only was I physically impaired but I was now becoming increasingly worried about my memory and my ability to think clearly. I actually felt embarrassed about this because I didn't know what was wrong with me and I felt inadequate because it was so unlike me. I was struggling with even basic things and here I was a senior manager, leading a large team, so I was worried about people finding out. I had always been able to take in large amounts of information very quickly and clarify difficult topics with ease but these skills were rapidly disappearing. I knew I needed to give up work, but we had a mortgage and bills to pay and a family to support.

Then the crux came when one day I took a taxi to meet my mum who was seventy-eight at the time. We spent an hour walking around the town together, but it tired me out to the extent that *she*, an old lady herself, had to take *me* back to the taxi rank. I cried all the way home, feeling really sorry for myself and struggling to understand what I had done to deserve to be so pathetic that even my mother could walk better than me. It was always supposed to be the other way around, where the child nurses or looks after the parent in their dotage, so you can imagine how I must have felt with this debilitating illness.

It was shortly after this that I saw a consultant, who diagnosed me with fibromyalgia and explained how stress aggravates the condition. He told me that if I didn't change my life, I would end up in a wheelchair ...

☺ This was a turning point in my life. I was so scared that I knew I had to take *positive* action.

I resigned from my highly paid job the very next day and took a position working twenty-one hours a week for a less dynamic organisation. Fortunately, they were very understanding about the fact that I needed less stress. I changed my personal life also and made things easier at home by employing a lovely lady for eighteen hours a week to help around the house. She did everything apart from the cooking. I felt bad that I had to rely on

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someone thirty years older than me to keep the house going but she was happy to have the work and I really thought I had solved the problem.

I was far less stressed and actually went through a period of semi-remission for a few months. I was by no means symptom-free, but the attacks were certainly less frequent, maybe once or twice a week, as I was getting lots of rest. Then the company underwent a management reshuffle and the leadership team changed and with it my stress levels and workload began to creep up again, as did the symptoms. They were actually *worse* now than *ever* before.

My Symptoms

Exhaustion

I was completely exhausted physically almost all the time and I literally dreaded being invited out to family or social events, being unable to stay up after 9.00 p.m. Before I was diagnosed I found this really embarrassing and I was convinced everyone would think I was a complete misery; at least afterwards I had a label I could use to explain my condition. It made me incredibly irritable; in fact, I was positively awful to live with. I remember frequently wanting to scream at my husband if he delayed me from sitting down because he wanted a hug. I knew he was just being his usual loving self, but in my head I would be screaming, Are you stupid? Don't you know how bad I feel? I don't need a hug – I need to lie down. I don't think I actually ever said it out loud (well maybe once or twice☺), but that did not make me feel any less guilty.

Pain

My entire body hurt. Both my muscles and limbs ached and burned, but it was unlike any pain I had ever experienced from exercise – indeed, it was far more intense. I would get continuous shooting pains, which I can only liken to a scorching pain as though my nerve endings were on fire. Painkillers had no effect, which in itself was really frustrating.

Sore skin

I could not bear for anyone, including my daughter or husband, to touch me. The sensation was a bit like having sunburn and someone hugging you. I felt so guilty whenever they put their arms around me to give me a cuddle when I just wanted to push them away.

Tender points

I had seventeen of the eighteen known tender points recognised as the criteria used for classification (a minimum of eleven), which meant that basic things we take for granted such

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as sitting or lying down were really uncomfortable. And yet it was these things that I really needed to do, owing to the complete and utter exhaustion and discomfort I felt.

☺ Actually, I had all eighteen but one was not as tender as the rest – this is me focusing on the positives.

Muscle spasms – twitches

Even my muscles went into spasms and twitched beyond my control. These sensations were really strange, annoying and unpleasant and whilst they only lasted a few seconds, I often found myself crying out in pain.

Neck pain

My neck hurt like crazy and it was incessant. I used to roll up a towel and put it under my neck before going to sleep. Looking back, I realise now that I should have tried a soft collar, but the thought was just so depressing and they are hardly attractive nightwear for a married woman! I was unable to carry simple, everyday things like bags without triggering pain in my neck that would be unbearable and continuous for days. Driving for more than fifteen minutes at a time was also impossible, because the pain would become so bad it would reduce my concentration. I was also unable to support things for sustained periods for the same reason. I would frequently wake up with excruciating neck pain, so much so I literally could not move my head without being in agony. It was like a continuous burning sensation or ache rather than a throbbing but it was nonetheless incredibly intense and if I moved I would get really intense shooting pains. I knew that the only way to ease it was to move my head, so I would stand in the shower, sobbing whilst trying to move my head through the pain until it eased off slightly.

My husband was incredibly supportive during this time and he would help me out of bed in the morning and run the shower for me. Because I woke frequently at night he would check I was OK. He was always very patient, even though he had to get up at 6.00 a.m., and I felt incredibly guilty about it.

Intense menstrual period pain

Every month I knew I was going to be in agony. No amount of painkillers made any impact and neither did Tens machines, hot-water bottles or pain-relieving, anti-inflammatory creams. I found myself becoming increasingly irritable and the fatigue was disabling.

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Lack of concentration/brain fog

I have always had a great memory and I have been fortunate enough to be able to both absorb information very quickly and retain it. So to get to the stage where I struggled to remember even basic things was incredibly demoralising. I thought I was losing my mind and constantly forgot what I was supposed to be doing. If I was reading I would forget what I had read and I used to get forget the way to places – even places I had been to often. It never lasted long in that my mind would just go blank for a few minutes, but it was frightening and frustrating nonetheless – sometimes even dangerous.

Sleep problems

I struggled to get to sleep because of the pain and would wake up frequently. I had to change position throughout the night in an effort to make my neck comfortable but with the other tender points to contend with there really was no comfortable position to sleep in, because wherever these points made contact with the mattress it was really painful. I would also know about it if my husband moved and accidentally touched my elbow, for example. In the morning I would wake up feeling like I had been trampled by elephants. I just wanted to cry. I just couldn't face having to get up and function as a normal human being. Indeed, I couldn't live a normal life as such. I actually remember thinking some mornings that I should be in hospital and that no one this ill should be left to just suffer in silence. When I was so incredibly tired I used to feel nauseous but I knew that if I slept it would ease off – it was like a vicious circle.

Poor circulation

With the burning or tingling sensation, and the swelling in my hands and feet, my rings constantly got stuck and felt like they were cutting into my fingers, so most days I would not even be able to wear my wedding ring.

Feeling an urgent need to urinate

This was an incredibly distressing problem. I was back and to from the toilet all the time because of the over stimulated nerve endings in the bladder, sometimes within minutes of sitting down, and if I didn't go, because of my increased sensitivity to pain it was excruciating. The only way I could cope with long journeys or meetings where I would not be able to get up or leave to go to the toilet was to avoid drinking and pray.

With each month the attacks got worse and lasted longer and longer, until it seemed the symptoms were permanent. I tried all sorts of remedies including acupuncture, medication and supplements. The acupuncture brought some relief to the pain in my knees, but nothing made any real difference. I took two months off work but there was still no improvement.

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☺ Thankfully, my husband took charge – not that I was in a position to argue. I was exhausted and just wanted to be looked after. We ate stuff that was really easy to make or he cooked. Despite our worries over money, he made me resign from my part-time job and we moved away from the city to a lovely village in the countryside. He let me think it over for all of thirty seconds, provided I agreed!

I was optimistic in nature and believed wholeheartedly again that this would be the cure, the answer to our problems. I would relax for a year, giving my body the opportunity to recover, and then get straight back into it. However, this gave me plenty of time on my hands and the symptoms remained as long as I continued to analyse them.

For four years I lived a *restricted* life, resting most of the day while my husband was at work for long hours and my daughter was at school. I did everything I could to avoid stress and to allow my body to recover. But nothing seemed to make much difference.

Through sheer determination, I reached a point where I could walk my daughter to school, provided I rested afterwards. On good day I was able to drive short distances. I learnt to push myself through the pain to do things that I wanted achieve, but I would have to suffer the consequences for days afterwards. I am sure you have heard the expression ‘be careful what you wish for’. I had spent years longing to be a stay-at-home mum because I thought it would make me a better mum. Now, I had been granted my wish. Whilst I was at home all the time, my condition meant it was a constant struggle for me to be the kind of mum I wanted to be.

During this time I learnt to paint in watercolours, but on bad days I could not even hold the paintbrush because both my arms and neck ached. Neither could I read most days because I found holding the book too tiring. This is the main reason for converting this book into an e-book, knowing how painful and impossible it is to hold a book for any length of time, never mind turn the pages. At least this way you can put the laptop on your knee and just press a key to turn a page.

I felt completely isolated and extremely low. No matter how much people tried and how nice they were, I knew that they did not understand. To them I looked completely healthy and they were unable to appreciate the feelings of isolation, loneliness and guilt that go with this condition, unless they have suffered from it themselves.

My emotions were all over the place. I was so tired and I was constantly snapping at my husband. By this stage it was almost impossible not to be angry when I was given a hug. I felt guilty and frustrated, forced to reject affection because I was so sore – love really did hurt. I needed my husband to hold me and make me feel safe, but at the same time I

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couldn't let him because of how it made me feel. My fibromyalgia got increasingly worse and I became more and more withdrawn, until one day a very dear friend described me as having retired from life!

☺ Writing these paragraphs reminds me of how bad it was but it's important that you know the details and take faith in the fact that you can recover from this debilitating illness or at least cope and learn to manage this condition. The agonies of these moments became the driving force behind the positive changes I created to escape from the endless agony and lack of energy. I will share my methods in later chapters to help you regain your life and have a great future.

After a while I no longer felt stressed and I managed to get to the stage where I could at least walk. Because I was so desperate to be so-called 'normal', I would push myself to do normal things with my family and friends. Afterwards, I would know about it and I would be forced to spend days lying on the couch in agony.

Then at a routine check-up my doctor told me about a special pain clinic for fibromyalgia and ME/CFS and asked me if I wanted to attend a course of treatment there. It was half an hour's drive away, so my husband and I agreed that he would take me if I was ever too tired to drive; we could not miss out on this opportunity and I had to do something if I was to recover.

☺ He actually ended up driving me to all the sessions and never once made me feel guilty that he would have to catch up on work or was giving up his holidays – honestly, the man is a saint.

The clinic was run by a clinical psychologist, who focused on how the way we think affects our condition. We were asked to go into a very detailed analysis of how much energy we used on daily activities. It even included low-energy activities like having a conversation. For weeks we monitored the effects our activities had on our symptoms. I found this period of my life incredibly depressing, because it made me focus on just how pathetic my life was and how little I could actually do. But at the same time I could see the sense in what he was saying.

☺ I am eternally grateful to the team at the clinic because they explained how the way we think and our mood affect the way we feel. I will never forget sitting in that group. There were about fourteen of

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us and I remember listening to everyone else insist that they had no control over their body or their symptoms. This is where our differences lay, for inside, I was jumping for joy. Indeed, it became apparent that I was the only one who felt this way and part of me was determined to be different and believe it was possible to get better. Yes, I thought, maybe finally I could find a way to control this terrible illness.

Immediately I began to learn more about the power of the unconscious mind. I read lots of books and started to put the methods into practice. Initially it was very difficult for me to read, because by the time I got to the bottom of the page I had forgotten what I had read. I just gave myself lots of breaks to rest my mind, arms and neck. Wherever possible I got audio books, but eventually it got easier and my fibro fog began to clear as I became more and more engrossed in studying the power of the mind and the mind–body connection.

☺ Unconsciously, I was already working towards trying out different techniques and one of those I was concentrating on was getting better sleep by setting my sleep anchor, even though I had no idea what one was at the time; I will talk more about this later.

Gradually, I started to feel better, which in turn spurred me on even more. I began to take courses and trained in various therapies, gaining qualifications in NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), hypnosis, timeline therapy® and coaching. Everything I learnt, I adapted to my illness and I worked on myself constantly. I was beginning to feel great and my flare-ups became milder and less frequent, until one day they disappeared altogether.

☺ In the following chapters I will be sharing *all* these techniques with you so that *you* might begin to work on your own self and change your own life/view.

At the same time, whilst I put my all into it and for the first time in years felt I was beginning to recover, I was sensible and made sure I did not overdo things. I told myself I needed six months before I could completely be reassured that it was gone. In the back of my mind I was concerned about what would happen if I encountered a stressful situation. I knew I was now equipped to control my condition, wellness, anxieties and stress, but inside I still had a niggling doubt. Was I in control or could the stress overwhelm me again? Then my big challenge came. We had moved into another house to help one of our children get on

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the property ladder and were in the middle of a massive renovation project, whilst still living in the property. The whole job was meant to take six months, but after this period we were less than a third of the way through the work. Our builder seemed unable to finish the job for whatever reason; we had no heating, kitchen or proper bathroom and his only other worker had been assigned another job. Only half the property had a roof, the back half of the house had no walls and most rooms had water leaking in. We were unable to cook proper meals and our clothes and furniture were getting mouldy because of the damp – believe me, I am not overstating how bad it was. Costs were escalating and we stood to lose tens of thousands of pounds – it was the worst time of our life together.

It was now September 2006 and I had begun focusing on total healing. We had been in our new 'house' for twelve months when I asked my unconscious mind, God and the universe to heal my body completely so that I could live a healthy life to the age of 97.

I had the symptoms of a bladder infection two weeks later, but the urine test proved negative. About a month later it came back, but again the test was negative. So my GP sent me for an ultrasound scan, 'just to see if my tubes were twisted'.

My tubes were fine, but the ultrasound showed a growth in my left kidney. They believed it to be an angiomyolipoma (rare, well-known soft tissue tumour which can achieve a large size and is usually benign), but they booked me in for an MRI scan to make sure.

It was a few days after this that part of the roof fell in; the actual roof on the house, that is, not my world – I told you we had a poor builder. The universe then delivered a lovely man called Ernie, who took charge of the building project and brought in a team of skilled workmen and craftsmen who worked long hours to put our home back together.

The initial diagnosis proved correct and the growth in my kidney was, indeed, benign, but it would not have been responsible for causing the bladder infections. However, the MRI scan also revealed an unidentified growth in my pancreas.

Statistics on the Internet revealed that only 3 per cent of people with pancreatic cancer live for more than three years. I don't mind admitting I was terrified. Not because I was afraid of death but because I could not bear the thought of leaving my daughter and husband behind. I knew they would take care of each other, but I also knew how much they both needed me and the feeling was reciprocated.

I spent twenty-four hours lying in my husband's arms, planning what I would do if the news spelt the worst. Then my thoughts turned to when I had asked my body to heal itself and I put this process into overdrive, though I knew that this was just a small part of the procedure. My husband and I immediately organised an endoscopic scan to see what was going on inside (there was no way we could wait until after Christmas) so that I could find out exactly what I had and to enable me to start to fight it.

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We went to London three days before Christmas where I had the scan, but they still could not ascertain what the tumour was. It was a particularly emotional time as we stood in front of the huge Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square, listening to the carols, yet the whole time my mind was focused on my healing techniques. On Christmas Eve, the walls having been plastered just hours before and the kitchen still only half finished, we put the tree up. By this time about half the house was just about habitable. I stood in front of our own tree and thought: no way is this going to be my last Christmas.

I had more than half my pancreas removed in February 2007, the day after my daughter's thirteenth birthday. Thankfully, I was calm and confident about the outcome and I spent the time in hospital whilst waiting for my operation and various tests to be completed painting watercolour postcards. We sat on my hospital bed while she opened her presents and I hugged her and said, 'I'll see you in a week, princess. I promise you I'll be fine.' I meant every word.

☺ My surgeon told me that nothing I had been through before, not even the symptoms of fibromyalgia, could prepare me for the excruciating pain I would be in – *great!*

My husband and I had decided that since it was such a dangerous operation and because of what I had been told to expect afterwards, it wasn't something we wanted our daughter to see and I so I knew it would be at least a week before I was in any condition to be a mum again. It was booked for a fifteen-hour Whipple operation. If you're not too squeamish – Google it! But thankfully they did not need to remove my entire pancreas.

Despite contracting a life-threatening MRSA infection I made a very quick recovery. I had made myself hypnosis CDs beforehand and worked through lots of healing processes. It was while I was recovering from MRSA that I looked at a small pink freckle that I'd had on my arm for years and thought: I won't feel safe until that's gone. It was a strange thing to think, as I had not yet received the results of my tumour. The tumour apparently was very rare and the surgeon told me I had been incredibly lucky, as it was still benign but was of a type that usually turned malignant.

A month after I came out of hospital I saw my GP about the freckle and was assured it was nothing. I knew from research that I had done that it did not look like malignant melanoma, and it had not changed, but my mind kept telling me I had to get it checked out by a specialist.

I was back at the doctors again a month later, only this time I was sent to the hospital to put my mind at rest rather than actually because something was wrong. The surgeon assured me it was nothing and that it had none of the characteristics of a malignant

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melanoma, but she agreed to remove it nonetheless to stop me worrying. Once the biopsy was done I was told would get a letter in two weeks to confirm all was well.

About ten days later the call came asking me to attend the hospital that same day. I remember the surgeon saying to me, 'Thank God you know your own body.' It was a malignant melanoma, caught in the very early stages but still only weeks away from being stage II skin cancer.

Thankfully, I have made a full recovery from both conditions. I do not have any ongoing treatments and despite only having less than half my pancreas, I'm not diabetic. Although I will be monitored for the rest of my life, I am confident I will reach the ripe old age of 97.

☺ Throughout this time my fibromyalgia did not flare up. Today, I remain in control of it – it no longer controls me. In fact, I am fitter now than ever and I lead a fantastic life.

I am now able to live a normal life and I am positively, truly happy. My positivity is infectious and people describe me as having an energy that makes them feel positive and safe. They say that they find themselves wanting to be around me and thinking about me for no apparent reason – quite a contrast from the uptight, stressed out, exhausted individual of old.

These days I am able to work full time as a coach and therapist helping others. I can choose when I work and for how long. I am now very fit and I'm able to work out at the gym five or six times a week. My favourite classes are Body Combat and yoga.

Not only am I symptom-free, but I also have what I call 'emotional balance'. I love my work – encouraging and supporting others is so satisfying. My personal life is fantastic and I am really happy with who I am. I feel complete and worthy of the great life I am privileged enough to lead.

It is my great pleasure to share my techniques with you and give you the opportunity to regain control of your life. Let's now begin your journey ... and if you choose to adopt my approach, I sincerely hope that it will work for you as well as it does for me.

The Awesome Power of the Mind

*There is only one person who could ever make you happy,
And that person is you.*

David Burns, Intimate Connections

Your mind is the most powerful computer on the planet and your software is what controls your behaviour and thinking. Even though your mind is incredibly powerful and complex, it is actually quite simple to understand because there are only two ways we make sense of our world: consciously and unconsciously.

Your Conscious Mind

This is the part of your mind that you think with deliberately – it is where decision-making takes place – and while this is the part of your thinking you are consciously aware of, research shows that it can only retain a handful of ideas at one time.

☺ Yes, I know some of you like me will be great at multitasking – I used to study whilst watching television and still pass my exams – but as you will discover later, it's not a great idea.

Your Unconscious Mind

Your unconscious mind is the larger section of your mind and it receives and processes over a million of bits of information every second via your senses: sight, smell, hearing and touch.

It contains all your memories, and even represses some painful memories. When you are asleep your conscious mind is resting, but your unconscious mind is dreaming wildly and continues to help you process what has happened during the day. I often just forget about a dilemma, confident that within an hour of waking up I will have the solution. That's because your unconscious mind has the ability to help you process solutions while you sleep. One very important task of the unconscious mind is that it holds the blueprint for perfect health. If you are having trouble accepting this, just ask yourself which part of your mind keeps you alive whilst you are asleep.

Your unconscious mind is also where most of your habits function. Whenever we learn to do something, it becomes automated, and so we become unconsciously skilled at it. As well as useful skills like tying your laces, driving your car and washing your hair, we can also get unconsciously skilled at harmful processes – including making ourselves feel depressed, stressing ourselves out or feeling anxious.

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Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP explores the relationship between how we think (neuro), how we communicate both verbally and non-verbally (linguistic) and our patterns of behaviour and emotion (programmes). It is the method used to consistently achieve specific and desired outcomes by using the language of the mind.

This type of therapy allows you to choose your behaviour and your emotional and physical state of well-being by understanding how the mind works and it also removes self-imposed limits.

NLP was pioneered by Richard Bandler and John Grinder in 1975 and they began by developing models based on top communicators of the time:

- Milton Eriksson –The great hypnotist of his time,
- Fritz Perls – psychiatrist, psychotherapist and creator of gestalt therapy (A therapy aimed at developing self-awareness),
- Virginia Satir – acclaimed lecturer, author, therapist and communicator.

Their aim was to discover why certain people produced excellence and then to create models to allow other people to develop similar behaviour.

Over the years a great many others have contributed to the growth of this field, developing techniques for rapidly and effectively changing beliefs, thoughts and behaviours that previously limited development.

NLP as it was first explained to me

I was told NLP was like a user manual for the brain – I looked vague but then the NLP trainer went on to explain, and I really got it.

Imagine getting a new mobile phone without any instructions. If your phone is like mine it will have many features that I didn't use for a long time because I could not be bothered to read the instructions. I remember lazily saying to my husband, 'Just tell me what I need to know to make calls.' Eventually, I realised there were other things I wanted to do and read the manual.

But let's assume I didn't receive any instructions and I figured out how to make a call and how to receive one, and that through guesswork I managed to store some numbers in the address book. But the rest of the features would probably go unused purely because I didn't know they were there in the first place.

Your brain is an amazing and far more complex machine, and we were all born without an instruction manual. The only instructions we receive during our lifetime are from our parents, teachers, siblings and peers. So we don't have any instructions really and certainly

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not a comprehensive guide, because we only know what they pass on to us and if they are doing something the hard way, that's the way they show us how to do it, too.

Because we don't have a user guide for our brain we don't understand all it can do and certainly don't know how to get the best out of its features. We make mistakes and hopefully learn from them. Many people go through their entire life feeling they have no control over their thinking or behaviour.

So what's all this got to do with NLP and fibromyalgia?

Quite simply NLP studies the structure of how humans think and experience the world. It has derived techniques for easily and rapidly changing thoughts, beliefs and behaviours.

Fibromyalgia is not an illness of the mind but, as with many other illnesses, how we think and feel has a direct impact on our condition. Recently someone told me that it made her feel weak-minded that she had not been able to think herself out of her symptoms. This is not the case at all. You cannot just think your symptoms away. But I do believe that, like me, once you understand the techniques available you can use them to gain freedom from your symptoms forever.

There is no doubt that the way we feel has an effect on our health and in particular our recovery from illness. I know that many fibromyalgia sufferers do not like to accept that their feelings have any bearing on their illness. This is because they feel that it suggests that fibromyalgia is not a real illness and that it is all in the mind.

Fibromyalgia is no different to any other illness in that recovery is quicker in patients with a positive mental attitude. When I was recovering from my pancreatectomy I had a very positive mindset and had recorded various hypnosis sessions to aid my healing. I was actually told by my specialist Macmillan nurse that I was making the fastest recovery in history. So in my opinion using your mind to help you recover from fibromyalgia is no exception.

Taking Responsibility for Your Future

The decisions you make today will affect where you are in a year, five years, maybe even ten years. So make the choice today to let go of fear, anger and guilt and choose health every time. Many psychologists believe that two emotions contribute to disease: fear and anger.

Anger can manifest as impatience, irritation, frustration, criticism, resentment, jealousy or bitterness. These are all thoughts that poison the body. When we release this burden, all the organs in our body begin to function properly.

Fear often shows up as tension, anxiety, nervousness, worry, doubt, unworthiness or a feeling that one is not good enough. Some people believe that fibromyalgia is fear displaying

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itself as extreme tension owing to stress and that in order to heal you must learn to substitute faith for fear. I am not talking about religion – I believe in having faith in life, yourself and the law of attraction.

Over the years my studies and my own experience have led me to the firm conclusion that the universe (via the law of attraction) will deliver to you what you think about most. So if you constantly think about being in pain and being exhausted, you will get more of the same. Your unconscious mind does not make judgements about what you want – but it only works in the positive. In other words, your thoughts become things. You get what you think about. Your unconscious mind does not judge whether what you think about all the time will be good for you – it just assumes you want it. So if you think about debt or pain all the time you will get more of it.

For some of you this may sound a little what I call ‘woo-woo’, but if you think about it practically your unconscious mind is constantly working to deliver to you what you want. And we know from various studies that your mind processes everything as a positive first. For instance, if I say, ‘Don’t think of a blue tree,’ you automatically have to think about it. It is impossible not to even if it is only for a second. You have to think about it before you reach a point where you decide that you cannot or shouldn’t think about it.

Most people constantly think about what they *don’t* want instead of what they *do* and then are dismayed when they get more of what they don’t want. So how can you retrain your brain to think about the things you want?

By this I do not mean sitting back and thinking ‘I want to get well and have a million pounds’ and expecting it to happen. You have to know what you want, tell your unconscious mind what you want and then be willing to take actions guided by your unconscious mind so that you can achieve your goal. In simple terms it means having a clear positive image, following your positive instincts, monitoring your results and changing your thoughts and actions as needed.

Becoming Certain that I Would Recover

It is so much easier to make things happen if we believe strongly that it will. Think of something that you strongly believe in. (That the sun will come up tomorrow, for example.)

Notice what images, sounds and feelings arise when you think about this belief and how certain you feel about it. Now think about recovering from fibromyalgia; notice what images, sounds and feelings arise when you think about this thought and your uncertainty about it. Have you noticed the difference between these images?

I changed my belief by thinking about the sun coming up. The image I had was bright colours, gentle warmth, birds singing and movement –

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this image makes me feel good. It did not have a border or a frame around it and the image itself was located just to the left at about eye level, about a foot from my head.

If I thought about recovering from my illness the image I held in my mind was black and white, still and had no sound but the accompanying emotion was a heavy, sad feeling. It had a border and was positioned down and to my right-hand side at about hip level.

I simply changed the sub-modalities (that's the things listed above) to match those of the belief that the sun would come up. I did this by visualising each change.

☺ I know it sounds totally 'woo-woo' and many of my clients' first reaction is that they don't make images. This is because they are thinking too consciously. Once they relax, they are amazed at the images that they have been creating all the time without even being aware of them. It's not uncommon in people with fibromyalgia for the image of their illness to be very large and right in front of their face, almost blocking out everything else.

Tuning Out

As I explained earlier your mind receives millions of bits of information every second. If you were aware of all the information you were receiving your mind would be overloaded. So your unconscious mind does three things with the information it receives – deletes, distorts and generalises.

Deletion

For instance, you were probably not conscious of the clothes on your body until you read this. Your mind is deleting information it doesn't think is important and brings to your attention things it thinks you want to know. Have you ever noticed that when you choose a new type of car you want that you notice them everywhere? Or if you work for a company selling a particular sports brand you constantly notice the type of trainers people are wearing.

Because you are so used to being in pain, your mind is naturally very aware of the pain and gradually, over time, you become more and more tuned in to your pain. It's like tuning in to a radio station on a dial. The more tuned in you become the more intense the pain.

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Making problems even worse!

There is no doubt that some of you will be going through real challenges right now or will face them during your recovery. I will share with you how to deal with those situations later.

But some of us live life feeling like we are going from one trauma to another. Everything seems like such a big deal and after a while we end up believing that everything really is a trauma, telling ourselves it is because we are ill and can't cope. We fail to recognise that the way we feel about problems has a lot to do with how quickly and efficiently we are able to resolve them, especially if we are manifesting them.

As you develop into the habit of responding to life with more ease, problems which seemed insurmountable will begin to seem more manageable. Even the biggest of events will seem more within your control. This is not to say that you can control everything that is happening in your life. What you have to do is ask yourself if there is anything you can do to improve this situation or deal with this problem. If the answer is yes, then take the action and await the results. However, sometimes the answer will simply be no, there is nothing you can do to change the situation, in which case all you can do is choose how you react to it.

This involves replacing old habits of obsessing and worrying with a new behaviour of accepting and dealing with your problems without blowing them out of proportion.

For example, if you are in the local supermarket and someone you know does not acknowledge your wave, do not automatically assume they have snubbed you or that you have done something to offend them. Realise instead that they may be busy, distracted or even short-sighted and may not even have noticed you.

If you have burnt the dinner and have had to order a pizza, does this mean that you are a terrible wife and mother or does it just mean that tonight the family can have a treat?

☺ If I got upset every time I dropped a plate or smashed a glass while I was ill, I would have been constantly distressed. We just bought really cheap crockery that could be replaced easily – and the dogs loved grabbing the food as soon as it hit the floor.

One of the best things I ever heard for keeping things in perspective was to ask 'Will it matter in six months?' Quite honestly, for most of the situations we get stressed about the answer is no.

As personal development guru Anthony Robbins says, 'Make your goals so big that it makes your problems appear small by comparison.' Recovering from fibromyalgia and having a better life than before is a great goal. What do you want to do when you have recovered?

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Generalising

Your unconscious mind generalises information it receives, which is really useful because without this process every time you came to a door you would have to work out how to open it.

When it is less helpful is when you generalise events and categorise them as negative. For example, if you automatically assume that every time the phone rings it will be bad news or a problem, it will not be long before you dread the sound of the phone ringing.

I noticed that over the years when I was suffering from fibromyalgia I attributed more and more things to my condition and worried that it meant I was getting worse.

It was an important part of my recovery process to acknowledge that healthy people get viruses and aches and pains as well and that not everything I felt was related to fibromyalgia. Although I felt that fibromyalgia made everything feel worse, I realised that this was because I was so obsessed with checking my body for new symptoms and ailments that I was increasing the intensity of them.

Forget about perfection

The need for perfection and the desire to be perfect are a certain way to make you feel negative. Whenever you are obsessed with being perfect you are on a losing battle. This is because nothing and no one is perfect.

Renowned physicist Stephen Hawking teaches us that the universe only exists because of imperfection. So without imperfection you would not even be here. If you set yourself a goal and continuously focus on the fact that you have not yet achieved it or on any setbacks (imperfections) along the way, it will actually detract you from achieving your goal.

This strategy has nothing to do with not striving to be your very best but with not being overly attached and focused on what is wrong with life.

The way to become more peaceful is to quickly deal with your negative and insecure thinking. Take control of your emotions and ask what you can learn from even negative situations.

Have you ever noticed how stressed you become when you are caught up in a cycle of negative thinking? You become absorbed in the details of whatever is making you anxious. In other words, when people have a problem they look at every detail of it, trying to analyse it from every angle, dissecting it and putting themselves through hell by going over and over it. This might be by going over the past or by worrying about what might happen in the future. One thought leads to another and you begin rehearsing conversations in your head. Often, you will feel that you are in some way the victim in the situation and that will inevitably lead you to feel less powerful.

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Distortion

We all have our own unique model of the world. By this I mean that we all have beliefs and values that have been created over our lifetime – many of which were created in childhood – that affect our thinking and behaviour.

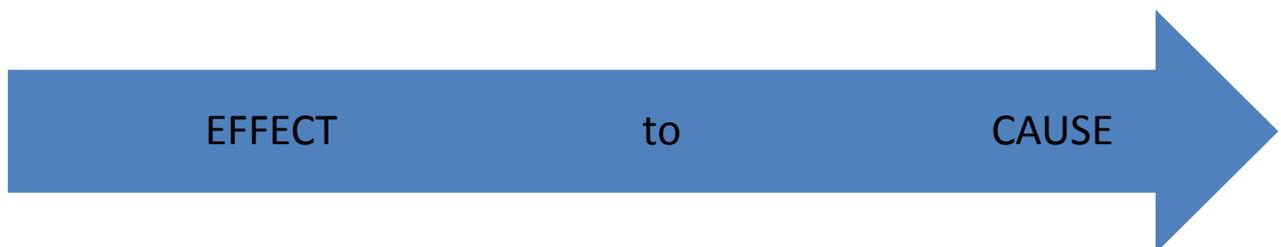
Our beliefs and values underpin everything we do. Have you ever wondered why some people behave in a way that is totally unacceptable in your opinion, yet they think it is the correct way to behave? This is because they have very different values and beliefs to you.

Your unconscious mind stores your beliefs and values and will actively seek out information that supports them. So if you are the type of person who believes that most people are bad and dishonest, or that everything goes wrong for you, you will tend to notice evidence that supports this.

☺ Or if, like me, you believe that most people are kind, good and honest, you will find your world is filled with these people.

Cause and effect

Around 80 per cent of people live their life near to or on the effect side of life. This means that they feel that things happen to them and that for most things they have no control over events. We all know people who feel like this and they are easy to spot by the things they say. 'I would be slim if it was not for my wife and the meals she makes'; 'I would have more money if it was not for the economy'; 'My kids make me stressed'.



People who feel like this are not bad people; they have just given away their power. It makes them feel helpless. They have become victims of circumstances. When people are at cause, they accept that most things in life are a result of conscious or unconscious decisions they have made. Even when they genuinely feel that an event was outside their control, they recognise they while they may not always be able to control the events that come into their life they can control how they react to them. They know that they are the pilot of their life, that they are in charge of their brain and therefore their results.

Taking responsibility for your life is not about blaming yourself, because this is also being a victim – a victim of yourself. So if you are the kind of person who thinks things like,

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I've messed up again, I'm such an idiot, *stop right now*. And accept that you were doing the best you could with the resources you had available at the time.

Letting things wait

Are you the kind of person who obsesses about getting things done in accordance with your imaginary deadlines?

☺ I know I was, and still would be if I did not keep myself in check.

The constant battle to manage daily tasks is exhausting enough without adding self-imposed deadlines. There are always things we have to do by a certain time, like take the children to school, but in all honesty is the world going to collapse if you have not filled the dishwasher first when could you do it when you get back?

☺ Confession: this was me – and it was not just about the dishwasher. My house had to look like a show home by 7.30 every morning!

I am not suggesting that you just keep leaving everything until another time. Just be realistic about the urgency, because if you constantly feel as though you are dashing around it will increase your stress levels, which adds to the feelings of exhaustion associated with fibromyalgia.

☺ I will never lose sight of the fact that my inner peace, health and happiness and that of those I love is the most important thing.

Relationships

As Dr Steven Covey explains in his self-help book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (published 2004) that all relationships are like a bank account. You make deposits and improve your relationships and when you make a withdrawal you weaken your relationships.

But unlike a bank account the deposits do not just sit there, so to maintain a healthy relationship you have keep making new deposits.

How have you trained people to treat you?

From the moment we meet someone new we begin training them how to treat us. Unfortunately, many of us just keep accepting poor treatment or behaviour and become

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increasingly resentful. We expect the other person to know that even though we are allowing them to treat us in a certain way we are actually not happy with it.

The other mistake we make is that we judge other people by our interpretation of their actions. For instance, if you are someone who is normally very punctual and who would never be late when meeting a friend, even if you don't care very much about them. When your friend turns up thirty minutes late for a lunch date, do you automatically assume that you must mean very little to them? In fact, it is probably just that they are bad at timekeeping and if you were to turn up an hour late they would be fine about it.

My recovery required me to be totally focused on my goal. It meant that I had to put other things on hold for a while and I had to learn to say no to people who wanted me to do things that would drain my focus. This meant not taking on other people's problems – a habit I had developed in the past.

This actually has affected my relationship with some people, who did not like the fact that I no longer said yes to every request to assist them in some way. When I was first diagnosed with cancer I realised that these people who I had always tried to help, even if it meant sacrificing my own happiness, did not care whether I lived or died.

☺ Like all things in life there is an upside. Although this hurt at the time, in the long run their rejection has been for my own good, because I now focus my energies on the many people who gave me their love and support throughout my recovery from all my illnesses. It is these relationships which have grown and blossomed and I now find that I have more time, because I am not constantly trying to please everyone.

Life is Not Fair

We can moan all day long about the injustices of life. We can rant about how some people are born with all the advantages, but the fact is that it won't change a thing. We are not all born equal either physically or socially. So just surrender to the fact that life is not fair. And instead of focusing on what you *don't* have, begin to focus on what you can do with what you *do* have and where you are.

☺ I don't regret anything about my background and how poor we were, because it helped to shape who I am today. And I can look back with fondness on amusing moments, like the time we had second-hand wallpaper! – Honest it's true. It was taken down from our neighbour's fireplace wall in one piece and put up on ours.

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If you actually look for them the world is filled with inspirational stories of people who have overcome amazing odds to achieve fantastic things. These are the people who should be the heroes and heroines of our society. Instead, we focus on reading magazines about the lives of the rich and famous, feeling jealous of their glamorous lifestyle and then are secretly pleased when they fall off their pedestal.

We compare ourselves to friends, family and neighbours who we perceive as having a better life than us. But in reality we have no idea what is *really* going on in their life. We cannot be certain that the happy veneer they display to the world is real. But if it is real then learn to be pleased for them – because this is the quickest way to attract happiness into your own life.

Media

Every day we are bombarded with negative news and images. It is enough to bring the spirits of even the most positive crashing to the ground. While you are recovering you need to stop watching the news and reading the papers and magazines that are filled with depressing stories and features.

I am not asking you to live in a bubble but just to protect yourself from all the negativity around you. I deliberately did not listen to the news when I was recovering and I reached an agreement with my husband that he would inform me briefly of any world events he thought I needed to know about like an earthquake, for instance. This was great because he would tell me what was happening without all the hype and sensationalism. If there had been a big disaster, we would make a financial donation and I would get on with my recovery. This was not being callous. I knew that I was not able to go rushing off to the other side of the world to offer practical assistance and I knew that constantly hearing about their suffering would not help me in any way.

I have never bought newspapers and magazines, so I did not exactly have to give them up, but I would have done so because they also can have a negative effect on your state of mind and recovery. So if you read about celebrity lifestyles, have a tendency to make comparisons with your own life and feel jealous or enjoy hearing about their misfortunes or bad behaviour, consider giving them a miss during your recovery.

Support Groups and Forums

For people who are going through a difficult time I know that support groups and forums can do an amazing job of preventing people from feeling isolated. But at the same time I recognised that the last thing I needed was to hear about other people's symptoms or problems they were experiencing. How can you possibly lean on someone who is already

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bent double? Think about it like this: if someone is telling you their legs are really aching, the instant reaction from your unconscious mind is to become aware of your own legs to see if they are aching, too.

☺ With this in mind, I decided that the best way I could help other sufferers was to get better and then share with them how I did it. So I deliberately did not go on any forums or attend any support groups to learn more about my condition. And now I have written my book and hope it will help you to begin your journey to recovery.

Become More Determined

One of the biggest examples of something physical that people have to get through is recovering from an operation or a car accident. It's difficult because after you have got through whatever medical procedure it was; you then have to go through the rehabilitation process.

After my pancreatectomy I had an incredibly large wound (called a rooftop), which meant that my mobility was impaired. The nurses were wonderful and they encouraged me to get up within a couple of days. I was doing really well, listening to the healing CD I had made for myself before I went in, doing my breathing exercises several times a day and ensuring I coughed in the correct way. Another patient who had had the same operation a week earlier and could not get up commented on how focused I was and then I contracted a very severe MRSA infection. Fortunately, I was then able to switch my attention to clearing the infection.

Getting through things is about determination. It's also about being able to have the right belief. I never doubted my recovery for a minute. I just focused on asking my mind to tell me everything I needed to know in order to achieve perfect health. In fact, it was while I had MRSA (meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a skin bacterium that is resistant to a range of antibiotics) and was still awaiting the results of the biopsy on my tumour that I turned my attention to the small pink freckle I had had on my arm for the last twelve years. It was this freckle that, even though it had no characteristics of being so, turned out to be malignant!

Many people never really fully recover from things that they actually could. There are very good reasons for this: one is that they believe everything they are told. Have you accepted as fact that you will never recover from fibromyalgia, for instance?

When I contracted MRSA I knew some of my visitors would say 'Don't be discouraged', 'Don't be frustrated'. But your unconscious mind doesn't process negation so, of course, I would have immediately become these things. I could not allow that to happen, so my

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husband arranged for them not to come until I was in control. Obviously, I would have preferred not to have contracted MRSA, but once I knew I had it I did not spend even one minute thinking – why me? And I made sure everyone knew I was just fine and dealing with it.

Resolve to Recover from Fibromyalgia

I knew I needed to be very determined and focused on recovery and this is my strategy for determination:

- 1) Imagine yourself fully recovered from fibromyalgia:
 - see what you would see
 - hear what you would hear
 - notice what would you be doing
 - sense how good you would feel
 - really imagine it vividly
 - ensure the image you have is really appealing to you. I had several really compelling visions of myself being happy, healthy and fit at various times in my future.
- 2) Recall any negative suggestion that anyone gave you about not recovering and hear them say it in a voice you do not trust or believe – you can make it sound silly and squeaky or like a cartoon character if you like.
- 3) Promise yourself in a confident and certain tone of voice that you will recover fully.
- 4) Remember all the times you got through tough situations and how at the end of it you were a better person as a result of the experience.
- 5) Focus on those times and remember how it felt to be determined enough to get through anything:
 - see what you saw
 - hear what you heard
 - feel what you felt
 - notice where you had this feeling in your body
 - give it a colour – one that is a positive and happy colour to you.
- 6) Imagine the colour glowing inside you like a healing light.
- 7) Promise yourself again that you will recover from fibromyalgia and get the life you want:
 - say it with determination

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- imagine yourself getting through it and recovering
 - imagine what you will see, hear and feel
 - make the image really compelling
 - make it into a mini movie in your mind.
- 8) Each time you feel like giving up, think of this movie in your mind and feel the positive feeling that goes with it getting even stronger.

Your unconscious is extremely powerful but it works best when it has an image, because it makes it easier to create things. If you are asked to paint a picture of a flower and you have never seen one and so have no concept of what one is like or what a petal is, for example, it would be almost impossible for you to do so.

By doing the above exercise you are giving your unconscious mind something to aim for. The image you are creating is your goal and it is a lot easier to get to your destination on your journey if you know what it is you are aiming for.

Stop Talking About It

When you're not feeling well it's a natural reaction to want to talk about it. To tell people how you are feeling. This is particularly so when you have fibromyalgia, because often you look really well on the outside and it's natural to want to make them understand.

If you have friends who are also suffering it can seem comforting to share your experiences because let's face it – fibromyalgia is very isolating. But the problem is that every time you talk about your symptoms you are compounding and reinforcing them, so I decided to stop talking about my symptoms.

I now realise that I reinforced my symptoms by constantly telling myself – and my long-suffering husband if he was home – that I was in pain. At the time he was wonderful about it and would do anything he could think of to ease my pain. But it was only very recently he admitted to me how bad and helpless it made him feel!

How I stopped talking about it

If someone asked me how I was I answered, 'Great.' Even if I was having a bad day I would say, 'Good, thanks.' I was not lying as there were many aspects of my life that were good and even if my skin, neck or legs were hurting, I felt good about the fact that I could see the person and hear them asking me the question. Once I stopped telling people when my legs were hurting or that I felt tired and asked them about their day or chatted for a few minutes about pleasant things, I actually did feel a little bit better. This was because I had taken my

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focus off the pain for a few minutes. In the beginning my focus would return to the pain or tiredness immediately, but gradually it took longer and longer.

The Power of Hypnosis and Deep Relaxation

Hypnosis is a universally accepted technique used to help people make changes in their behaviour and thinking as well as to overcome illness, particularly when related to the nervous system. This is why I believe it is so effective for fibromyalgia sufferers, as it enables the unconscious mind to desensitise your ability to feel pain. It is a therapeutic practice designed to create an altered state of consciousness in order to stimulate the body and mind to relax and thereby enabling the unconscious mind to become suggestible.

It is generally accepted that all hypnosis is ultimately self-hypnosis. A hypnotist merely helps to facilitate your experience. In a hypnotherapy session you are always in control. You are not unconscious, you cannot 'get stuck' in hypnosis and you are not made to do anything; in fact, it is the opposite – it is about empowerment. So despite what we see to the contrary in movies or on television, it is not possible to make you do something under hypnosis which you would not otherwise want to do. In other words, no one can get you to rob a bank or anything like that.

Hypnosis has been scientifically proven to be effective in creating change in certain repetitive behaviours, including smoking, and also weight loss, stress reduction, motivation and pain control. To discern hypnosis it is first important to recognise what it is not:

- sleeping
- unconsciousness in the sense of insensibility
- being gullible or easily deceived
- being weak-minded, irresolute, weak-willed or impressionable
- being controlled by someone else or a loss of self-discipline or self-restraint.

Hypnosis is a state of relaxation that enables the mind to be open to suggestions through an altered state of consciousness.

As part of my journey into the power of the mind I studied to become a master practitioner of hypnosis. To aid my recovery I knew I needed to relax deeply so that I could speak to my body and allow it to heal and recover. To do this I recorded three wonderful hypnosis sessions that I could replay over and over to myself whenever needed: one was a wonderful energising and positive start to my day; the second was a powerful healing session and the third was a beautiful relaxation filled with gratitude to allow me to end the day and fall asleep from a very good place.

I feel at this point that I need to point out that I do not think other people need to study to the level I did to recover. I did it because I gave myself the dream of helping other people by

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becoming a coach – and having a goal also helped my recovery because it gave me another focus. If you decide to use the services of a hypnotherapist, do your research first. Make sure they are reputable and that they understand fibromyalgia and that you are comfortable with them. Alternatively, there are a range of pre-recorded hypnosis/relaxation products available. These may be a more cost-effective and convenient way of receiving the help you need, especially if travelling is difficult.

Hypnosis that targets fibromyalgia specifically is the most effective, but a general deep-relaxation CD may be just as effective for some people.

Summary – My Steps to Action

- 1) I realised that the way I regarded events was affected by my internal filters and that there might be another way to view the same event.
- 2) I changed my belief about recovering from fibromyalgia – so I was certain I could recover.
- 3) I stopped treating life like an emergency and living to false deadlines.
- 4) I stopped trying to be perfect.
- 5) I accepted that nothing is perfect and that's OK.
- 6) I accepted that everything in my life to date had been as a result of a conscious or unconscious decision I had made – and therefore my future was within my control.
- 7) I stopped sacrificing myself to please others.
- 8) I isolated myself from negative media interpretations and situations.
- 9) I made my recovery the most important thing.
- 10) I learnt to relax, forgive and heal my body and soul through hypnosis.

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Diet

The future depends on what we do in the present.

Mahatma Gandhi

Please note: the information provided in this section is mainstream data that is widely available in the UK and is the information I used to ensure I had a healthy, balanced diet.

It is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice. If you have any concerns about your weight, get in touch with your GP, medical practitioner or a dietitian.

You should always seek medical guidance before following any of the information in this section.

I am not going to start lecturing you about your diet or asking you to give up milk, oranges or anything else for that matter.

In my early twenties I was deeply unhappy. I felt like my life was out of control and I was trapped in a nightmare, emotionally unable to deal with my situation. I became bulimic for five years but thankfully, I eventually sorted myself out and adopted healthy eating habits.

So I really understand the temptation to comfort eat when you are feeling low. But eating only makes you feel better for a few minutes and sometimes not even that long.

Our emotions are our body's way of telling us that something is wrong. It's like someone knocking on a door – if you don't answer it the knocking will just get louder. Instead of eating you need to identify the emotion and deal with it. I will be covering dealing with your emotions in greater detail in another chapter dedicated to this subject.

When I developed fibromyalgia I did not have to change my diet at all to deal with my symptoms, but I must stress the following:

- I already ate a sensible and well-balanced diet.
- I was already eating my five fruit and vegetables a day and I had low-fat diet.
- I rarely drank any alcohol, just one glass of bubbly at a wedding or on Christmas Day.
- I have never drunk tea or coffee and rarely drank carbonated drinks.
- I always drank 1.5 to 2 litres of water per day.

Everyone should have a healthy diet and most of you will know what you should be eating. But just in case you do not know what to eat for good health, I have included some simple information for you.

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A Healthy, Balanced Diet

We hear so much often conflicting information about what we should and should not be eating that in the end we find ourselves not knowing what to eat. One year something is considered bad for you, so we avoid it like the plague, only to be told a year later that it is now considered to be good for you. My approach was very simple and that was to just to eat a sensible, balanced diet.

Balanced simply means eating from all the food groups in the sensible proportions. Now I'm not claiming I stick to this religiously every day.

☺ People who know me well know how much I love chocolate – my one weakness. Oh! and ice cream – my second weakness.☺ Oh! and curry – my third weakness.☺

But honestly, generally I am pretty sensible.

My healthy diet – daily servings

- fats, oils and sweets – only eaten occasionally or sparingly
- milk, yogurt and cheese – three servings
- meat, poultry, fish, dry beans and nuts – two servings
- fruit – two servings
- vegetables – three servings
- fortified cereal, bread and pasta – six servings
- fluid – eight glasses/2 litres of water a day

A healthy, balanced diet contains a variety of foods, including plenty of fruit and vegetables, plenty of starchy foods such as wholegrain bread, pasta and rice, some protein-rich foods such as meat, fish, eggs and lentils and some dairy products. A sensible diet should also be low in fat (especially saturated fat), salt and sugar.

Starchy Foods

Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes are a really important part of a healthy diet. Wholegrain varieties of starchy foods are the best choice.

I aim to make this food group comprise about a third of my diet. They are a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet. As well as starch, these foods contain fibre, calcium, iron and B vitamins.

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I always try to include at least one starchy product with each of my main meals. So I start the day with a wholegrain breakfast cereal, a sandwich for lunch and potatoes, pasta or rice with my evening meal.

Starchy foods are not as fattening as you might think. Gram for gram, they contain less than half the calories of fat. You just need to watch the fats you add to them when cooking and serving these foods, because this is what increases the calorie content.

Fibre

Most people don't eat enough fibre. Which is a shame because foods rich in fibre are a very healthy choice. I try to include a variety of these foods in my diet, such as wholegrain bread, brown rice, pasta, oats, beans, peas and lots of fruit and vegetables. There are two types of fibre: insoluble and soluble:

Insoluble fibre

Wholegrain bread, brown rice, wholegrain breakfast cereals and fruit and vegetables all contain this type of fibre. This is the fibre that the body cannot digest and so it passes through the gut, helping other food and waste products move through the gut more easily. I love wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals, so ensuring they are part of my diet is easy. I never have breakfast cereals with added sugar and neither do I add any myself.

Soluble fibre

Good sources of soluble fibre include oats and pulses such as beans and lentils. This fibre can be partially digested and may help to reduce the amount of cholesterol in the blood.

Fruit and Vegetables

Most people know we should be eating more fruit and vegetables, but most of us still don't eat enough – I am lucky because I love almost all types fruit and vegetables I don't enjoy a meal if it doesn't include lots of vegetables – once you expand your choices you'll find there is a great variety available. I always eat at least five portions a day. For example, I have:

- a banana every morning with my cereal; bananas are also a natural source of serotonin (the feel-good chemical), so they can help lift your mood
- an orange as mid-morning snack
- a side salad at lunch
- an apple as an afternoon snack, and
- lots of different vegetables with my evening meal.
- a slice of melon or a kiwi fruit as an evening snack

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There isn't always a vast choice of fresh fruit and vegetables available in the house, so for these instances I choose from my store of frozen, tinned or dried varieties. Fruit and vegetables make up about a third of the food I eat each day. And I also make sure I eat a variety, so I get the best mix of vitamins and minerals.

Serving Sizes

<i>One serving = 80g = any of these</i>
1 apple, banana, pear, orange or other similar-sized fruit
2 plums or similar-sized fruit
½ a grapefruit or avocado
1 slice of large fruit, such as melon or pineapple
3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables
3 heaped tablespoons of beans and pulses
3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad
1 heaped tablespoon of dried fruit
1 handful of grapes, cherries or berries
a dessert bowl of salad
a glass (150ml) of fruit juice

Fish and Shellfish

I like to eat at least two portions of fish a week and I also try to eat a wide variety to ensure I get the best balance of nutrients but I don't eat shellfish, it just doesn't appeal to me. Fish and shellfish are good sources of a variety of vitamins and minerals and oily fish is particularly rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

Although most people should be eating more fish for their health, there are maximum levels recommended for oily fish and crab (and some types of white fish). Please check with your dietitian or health provider for the recommended amounts; this is particularly important if you take supplements containing vitamin A.

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Oily fish, shellfish and omega-3

Oily fish such as mackerel, sardines, trout, herring and salmon contain the richest source of omega-3 fatty acids – which help prevent heart disease. The main shellfish sources are mussels, oysters, squid and crab. Some white fish and other shellfish also contain omega-3 fatty acids, but not as much as oily fish.

Fresh tuna is an oily fish and it is high in omega-3 fatty acids. But when it's canned, these fatty acids are reduced to levels similar to that of white fish. So, although canned tuna is a healthy choice for most people, it doesn't count as oily fish.

Eggs

Eggs (also, pulses, nuts and seeds) are all good sources of protein and they're easy to prepare. Eggs are a good source of protein and they contain vitamins and minerals. But it's important to store, handle, cook and prepare them properly to avoid food poisoning, especially for the very young, pregnant women and elderly people.

I am not currently aware of a recommended limit on how many eggs people should eat. I enjoy eggs and think they are a good choice as part of my healthy, balanced diet. But remember that it's a good idea to eat as varied a diet as possible. This means we should be trying to eat a variety of foods each week to get the wide range of nutrients we need.

Eggs and cholesterol

Eggs contain cholesterol and high-cholesterol levels in our blood increase our risk of heart disease. However, it is my understanding that the cholesterol we get from eggs has less effect on the amount of cholesterol in our blood than the amount of saturated fat we eat. People who are concerned about their level of cholesterol and who have a balanced diet should consult their medical practitioner or dietitian.

Pulses

A pulse is an edible seed that grows in a pod. Pulses are a great source of protein for vegetarians, but they are also a very healthy choice for meat-eaters.

Nuts

Nuts are high in fibre, rich in a wide range of vitamins and minerals and a good source of protein (which is important for vegetarians).

They can be a good alternative to snacks that are high in saturated fat and they are also a good source of monounsaturated fat, which can help reduce the amount of cholesterol in our blood. This food group also contain other unsaturated fats called 'essential fatty acids', which the body needs for good health.

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However, nuts are also high in fat, so it's a good idea not to eat too many of them – salted nuts are also very high in salt. Personally, I love most types of nuts, so I have to consciously restrict how many I eat – is this another of my weaknesses?☺

Seeds

Seeds contain protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They also add extra texture and flavour to various dishes and can be used to coat breads.

They make a healthy snack and I occasionally add them to salads, casseroles and breakfast cereals.

Meat

Meat is a good source of protein and vitamins and minerals, such as iron, selenium, zinc and B vitamins. It is also one of the main sources of vitamin B12.

Cutting down on fat

Some types of meat are high in fat, particularly saturated fat, which can raise cholesterol levels. Having high cholesterol increases the chances of developing heart disease.

When you're buying meat, always consider the type of cut or meat product you choose – I always avoid fatty meats. I always remove any visible fat and skin prior to cooking because fat, crackling and poultry skin are much higher in fat than the meat itself. Here are some other ways to reduce fat when you're cooking meat:

- grill meat rather than fry,
- try not to add extra fat or oil,
- roast meat on a metal rack above a roasting tin, so that the fat can run off,
- try using smaller quantities of meat in dishes and more vegetables, pulses and starchy foods.

I mainly eat poultry, not just for health reasons; it is just my preferred meat.

Drinks

Drinking is very important for our bodies to work properly and to make sure we don't get dehydrated. But to make healthy choices it's important to know what to drink and when.

Losing water

Water makes up 70 per cent of an adult's total body weight and without regular top-ups, our body's survival time is limited to a matter of days.

Water is essential for the body's growth and maintenance. It is lost from the body through urine and sweat, and must be replenished through our diet. *If you don't consume*

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enough you can become dehydrated, causing symptoms such as headaches, tiredness and loss of concentration.

How much water do we need?

In climates such as the UK, it is currently recommended that we should drink approximately 1.2 litres (6 to 8 glasses) of fluid every day to stop us from becoming dehydrated. In hotter climates the body needs more than this. Because I rarely drink anything else and because I exercise a lot, I personally drink approximately 2 litres a day.

Caffeinated drinks

Drinks that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee and cola, can act as mild diuretics, which mean they make the body produce more urine.

This affects some people more than others, but it also depends on how much caffeine you drink and how often. If one of your fibromyalgia symptoms is the need to pass urine frequently, you should consider cutting down on your caffeine intake. Reducing your intake should be done gradually, as cutting it out too quickly can cause side effects such as headaches. When I first decided to give up caffeinated drinks I was very concerned that I would be even more exhausted, because I had added occasional caffeinated drinks to my diet in an effort to give me an energy boost. But because I reduced my intake gradually, and replaced it with healthy stimulants like exercise and meditation, I actually had more energy.

Tea and coffee

Most people love their cup of tea or coffee and there's evidence to suggest that some chemicals in tea may be beneficial for the heart.

But tea and coffee also contain compounds called polyphenols, which can bind with iron making it harder for our bodies to absorb it. Cutting down on tea and coffee could help to improve iron levels in the body.

As already stated, caffeinated drinks such as strong tea, coffee and caffeine-containing energy drinks, can act as mild diuretics, which means they make the body produce more urine. Some people are more susceptible to this than others, but it also depends on how much caffeine you have and how often you have it. It's important that caffeinated drinks aren't your only source of fluid. Tea and coffee have never played any part in my fluid intake because I do not like them.

Signs of dehydration

One of the first signs of dehydration is feeling thirsty – people often confuse this with hunger and eat more than they need instead of actually giving their body the fluid it needs. If you

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think you might not be getting enough fluids, check if you are showing any of these other common signs of dehydration:

- dark-coloured urine and not passing very much when you go to the toilet
- headaches
- confusion and irritability
- lack of concentration.

Fibro fog could be much worse if you are dehydrated. When on a long journey I used to avoid drinking because of the urgent need to urinate and this always led to a worsening of my fog.

Water and soft drinks

Water is a healthy choice at any time and fruit juice is a great substitute with a meal. Remember to check the labels of drinks because they can often have hidden added sugars.

Water is the best choice for quenching your thirst between meals and rehydrating your body quickly. It is entirely calorie free and contains no sugars that damage teeth. But if you don't always want just plain water, vary it by having sparkling water, adding a slice of lemon or lime, or adding some squash or fruit juice to flavour it.

Milk

Milk contains vitamins and minerals such as calcium and it doesn't cause tooth decay. For a healthy choice, I always choose skimmed milk. It is not a good idea to have flavoured milks, milkshakes, condensed milk and milk-based energy or malt drinks, because these tend to contain added sugar, which is bad for teeth, and can be bad for the waistline.

Fruit juice and smoothies

Fruit juice and fruit smoothies contain lots of vitamins that are good for our health, especially Vitamin C. A glass (150ml) of fruit juice counts as one of the five fruit and vegetable portions we should be having each day.

However, you need to be aware that when fruit is juiced or blended, the sugar is released. Once released, these sugars can damage teeth, especially if fruit juice is drunk frequently.

Fizzy drinks, squashes and sports drinks

Fizzy drinks, squashes and 'juice drinks' can contain lots of sugar, which means they contain a lot of calories and very few nutrients.

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☺ I always choose the sugar-free options. In my model of the world this means I can have more chocolate.

Alcohol

Alcohol is high in calories and so can make you put on weight. It's also a diuretic, which means it makes the body lose more water than usual, so it is easier to become dehydrated.

Heavy drinking can lead to a wide range of health problems, including cancer, liver disease, stroke and high blood pressure and it can also affect mental health.

How much?

Information available in the UK currently states that women can drink up to two or three units of alcohol a day and men up to three or four units a day, without significant risk to their health.

If you have drunk too much, you should avoid alcohol for at least 48 hours to give your body a chance to recover.

I rarely drink alcohol and haven't done so for many years. For me a fortuitous decision to make because now that I only have half a pancreas at least I know it is in good shape and will not have been affected by years of excessive drinking.

What are Vitamins?

Vitamins are essential nutrients that your body needs in small amounts to work properly. There are two types of vitamins: fat-soluble and water-soluble.

Fat-soluble vitamins

These are found mainly in fatty foods such as animal fats (including butter and lard), vegetable oils, dairy products, liver and oily fish. Your body needs these vitamins daily in order to function properly. However, you don't need to eat foods containing them every day because if your body doesn't need these vitamins immediately, it stores them in your liver and fatty tissues for future use. This means the stores can build up and become replenished so they are there when you need them.

Water-soluble vitamins

These are not stored in the body, so you need to have them more frequently.

If you have more than you need, your body gets rid of the extra vitamins when you urinate. Water-soluble vitamins are found in fruit, vegetables and grains. But unlike fat-soluble vitamins, they can be destroyed by heat or by being exposed to the air. They can also be lost in the water used for cooking.

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This means that by cooking food, especially boiling, we lose lots of these vitamins from the food we eat. I choose to steam or grill my vegetables most of the time because this is the best way to retain as much of the water-soluble vitamins as possible.

What are Minerals?

These are essential nutrients that your body needs in small amounts to work properly. We need them in the form they are found in food.

These are necessary for three main reasons:

- building strong bones and teeth,
- controlling body fluids both inside and outside cells,
- turning the food we eat into energy,

Minerals can be found in varying amounts in a variety of foods such as meat, cereals bread, fish, milk and dairy products, vegetables, fruit and nuts.

Fats

Having some fat in our diet helps the body to absorb certain vitamins. Fat is a good source of energy and it provides essential fatty acids that the body itself cannot make. There are two main types of fat found in food:

Saturated fat

Eating a diet that is high in saturated fat can raise the level of cholesterol in your blood over a period of time. This increases your chance of developing heart disease. Foods that are high in saturated fat include:

- fatty cuts of meat and meat products such as sausages and pies,
- butter, ghee and lard,
- cream, soured cream, crème fraîche and ice cream,
- cheese, particularly hard cheese,
- pastries,
- cakes and biscuits,
- some savoury snacks,
- some sweet snacks and chocolate,
- coconut oil, coconut cream and palm oil.

I reduce my intake of saturated fat by:

- eating less of foods that are high in saturated fat,
- choosing options that are lower in saturated fat,
- going for unsaturated fats instead of saturated.

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☺ Whilst I have admitted to loving ice cream, where possible I choose the reduced-fat options or frozen yogurt.

How much is too much saturated fat?

According to information available in the UK:

- The average man should have no more than 30 grams of saturated fat a day.
- The average woman should have no more than 20 grams of saturated fat a day.
- Children should have less saturated fat than adults.

Unsaturated fat

Choosing unsaturated over saturated fat can help lower blood cholesterol and provide us with the essential fatty acids that the body needs. As part of my healthy diet, I therefore try to eat foods that are rich in unsaturated fat instead of saturated fat. Foods that are rich in unsaturated fat include:

- oily fish
- avocados
- nuts and seeds
- sunflower, rapeseed, olive and vegetable oils, and spreads.

Trans-fats

These are found naturally at low levels in some foods such as those from animals, including meat and dairy products. They can also be found in foods containing hydrogenated vegetable oil.

Like saturated fats, trans-fats raise the type of cholesterol in the blood that increases the risk of coronary heart disease. This is why it is currently recommended in the UK that trans-fats should make up no more than 2 per cent of the energy (calories) we get from our diet.

Salt

Every day 26 million adults in the UK eat too much salt. You could even be eating too much without realising, because about 75 per cent of the salt we consume is already in the food we buy.

☺ I always try to avoid adding salt to my food, although I do enjoy a sprinkle on my porridge.

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Vegetarians and Vegans

The important thing to remember if you're a vegetarian or a vegan is that you need to eat a balanced diet to ensure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs – ask your dietitian to advise you on the best choices for a healthy diet if you come under this category.

Healthy Weight

It is not a good idea to be either under or overweight. Eating too much can make you overweight, which can lead to ill health, such as heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetes. Not eating as much food as your body needs can also affect your health.

Personally, being a sensible weight where I feel fit and healthy and good about myself is very important not only for my self-esteem, but because I recognise that if I were carrying an extra 10 kg of fat around with me it would adversely affect my energy levels, put a strain on my joints and make everything harder work. .

Summary – My Healthy Eating Plan

- eating a well-balanced diet covering all food groups,
- reducing my saturated and trans-fats wherever possible,
- eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day,
- drinking lots of water and keeping well hydrated,
- staying within the recommended healthy weight band for my height.

<p>Please remember that the information provided in this section is mainstream and is widely available. It is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice. If you have concerns about your weight, get in touch with your GP, medical practitioner or a dietitian.</p>

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Exhaustion

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

Helen Keller

Exhaustion was one of the most difficult things for me to cope with. I found it incredibly frustrating because prior to developing fibromyalgia I was an energetic, successful person who could achieve huge amounts every day. I had completed a three-year course in just two years while working over seventy hours a week – and I still found time to work out at the gym several times a week. So naturally when I was unable to find the energy to do housework, walk my daughter to school and on really bad days even wash my own hair, you will understand how I would be upset.

☺ Although, I now admit to myself that the way I lived my life at top speed probably contributed to my developing fibromyalgia.

But the worst part was how irritable it made me. I would find myself snapping at those I love the most and would then feel terrible about it afterwards. My husband was always patient but, of course, he could never really hope to understand because one of the things about fibromyalgia is that you look healthy on the outside. He knows me so well that he could see when I was tired just by looking in my eyes, but even he could not gauge the intensity.

In my opinion the best way to understand why you are so exhausted is like this: every day we all have a certain amount of energy available to us and if you are using up large amounts of energy through being stressed or by multitasking you will soon feel tired out. We all need regular rest periods but, unfortunately, the more you sit around the more lethargic you will feel. So we also need to get moving again, but I know first-hand how hard it is to get started when suffering from this condition.

Meditation

I developed a wonderful meditation for myself that I would do three or four times a day. It was only seven minutes long but left me feeling re-energised. I cover meditation in more detail in my chapter on sleep difficulties – this is just to get you started.

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How I learnt to meditate – step one

I choose an orange (fruit), because it reminds me of the power of the sun. I would focus on the orange thinking about the shape, colour and texture, just rolling it around in my hand. When I was able to focus on the orange for two minutes I began to focus on myself internally.

My meditation – step two

- I would take three deep breaths and hold in each in breath before making a slight 'harr' sound with each exhalation.
- Imagining a piece of gold thread holding me up straight towards the sky, I would continue to breathe deeply while I repeated the following affirmations:
 - I am filled with the energy of the sun,
 - My body is becoming stronger and fitter every day,
 - I am now feeling more energised,
 - I am grateful for the increased energy I am feeling every day,
 - It feels good to have more energy,
 - Thank you for bringing me perfect health.
- If other thoughts drifted into my mind I would just allow them to float out again. Continue this exercise for five to seven minutes. There are lots of guided meditations available, including mine, but it is possible to develop your own.

Exercise

Caution: You should seek medical advice from a professional before undertaking or changing any exercise programme.
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During the first few years of suffering with fibromyalgia I tried to walk every day and although this greatly lifted my spirits, I almost always overexerted myself and would spend the afternoon and evening in great pain.

☺ I think of this as my crash-and-burn stage.

It should be noted that I was physically unable to do household chores like vacuuming carpets at this point. Therefore, we replaced as many of the carpets as possible with hardwood flooring and where we were unable to do this my husband would vacuum for me.

I also had to accept that if I was going to do housework I could not do the whole house on the same day. So instead I would do one room a day. This was not easy for me to come

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to terms with, because I had always been very house-proud, but I knew I had to let this go if I was going to recover enough to have a normal life.

☺ When I say this was not easy, I mean it was really difficult! It was a real test of my power over my mind not to notice the dust on the mantelpiece.

This section contains the mainstream information and guidance available regarding fibromyalgia and exercise, along with my own recovery programme. As fatigue is one of the main symptoms of fibromyalgia, you may feel unable to exercise. However, an exercise programme that is specifically suited to you, which takes into account your condition, can help you to manage your symptoms, as well as improve your overall health – I believe that becoming increasingly active was fundamental to my recovery.

Your GP, physiotherapist (health-care professional trained in using physical techniques to promote healing) or consultant can help you design a personal exercise programme, which is likely to involve a range of:

- aerobic exercises
- strengthening exercises

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic activities are any kind of rhythmic, moderate-intensity exercises that use the large muscles in your legs and buttocks. The workout should raise your heart rate and make you breathe harder – your current level of fitness should always be taken into consideration. There are some great gentle aerobic classes available at health clubs.

☺ The club I now attend has classes for all ages and levels of fitness. Honestly – it's not all about pushing yourself to the limits.

Examples of aerobic exercise include:

- walking
- cycling
- swimming in warm water

A number of studies have found that aerobic exercises may relieve pain. Because I was sensible and gradually increased my exercise levels without overexerting myself (as I did in the past), exercise was definitely beneficial in that it helped to reduce my fibromyalgia pain and increased my sense of well-being.

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☺ Walking with my dogs was great for me. We have two Teacup Yorkshire terriers – a breed specially chosen by my husband who researched how much exercise each breed needed and came to the conclusion they were practically stuffed! As it turned out they are perfect; they are happy to go on long walks or just as content to curl up in front of the fire.

Strengthening exercises

These exercises focus on strength training, such as weightlifting, and they need to be planned as part of a personalised exercise programme. It is vital that you are shown how to do them correctly; otherwise they can make muscle stiffness and soreness worse. Even healthy people suffer from muscle soreness if they do not follow a sensible plan, or do an exercise in the wrong way, so for fibromyalgia sufferers it is vital to seek professional advice.

Studies show that strengthening exercises may improve:

- muscle strength
- physical disability
- depression
- quality of life

My plan included both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercises and the benefits of exercise to me were that:

- my mood improved greatly
- I could concentrate better
- I had more energy
- I had less muscle stiffness.

I had already recovered before I discovered yoga, but for me this was a revelation – the weekly sessions are of great benefit to both my mind and body.

Do not exercise near bedtime, as this can make it more difficult for you to sleep. This subject will be covered in the chapter on sleep difficulties.

Pacing Yourself

☺ This involves balancing periods of activity with periods of rest and not overdoing it.

If you are one of the sufferers of fibromyalgia who constantly push yourself and then spend days paying for it – like I did for a while☺ – it could slow down your progress in the long

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term. Over time, you can gradually increase your periods of activity, while making sure that they are balanced with periods of rest.

Because patients with pain and fatigue understandably decrease their activity levels, they gradually become less fit, which in turn increases these symptoms. Exercise can help prevent this downward spiral. Since my condition was very severe, it was important that I started at a very low level of exercise and increased gradually. I began with gentle exercise for three minutes, three times per day – initially this involved just moving around at home to a song which helped me to feel happy. Crazy as this might sound, it always cheered me up. If my daughter was at home I would dance with her, which she loved because it really made her laugh. Some days, if I felt like I needed fresh air, I would dance in my garden. I progressed to two songs over a period of two weeks

☺ Fortunately, it was not overlooked by our neighbours.

Then I began walking, limiting myself to ten minutes three times a day. I gradually built this up to thirty minutes twice a day. Once I was able to do thirty minutes of exercise at this level without causing an adverse reaction, I increased the intensity by walking faster and by taking up swimming.

At first I thought I would look silly going to the baths and hardly doing any swimming and was concerned my arms would ache as walking had not really strengthened them. But I soon realised that no one at the baths was taking any notice of me.

☺ I like the saying 'You would not worry so much about what people think of you if you realised how little they do'.

Warming-up and cooling-down stretches are important for any exercise programme and more so for fibromyalgia sufferers. So I always took the time to stretch both before and after.

Important Points

While walking I would ensure that my mind was not focused on any discomfort or on how tired I felt at the start of the walk. This is because I knew that if I walked with the correct mindset I would feel better when I got back.

- I would focus on enjoying the surrounding countryside,
- list all the things in my life that I was grateful for,
- listen to music,
- repeat affirmations about how I felt more energised like:

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- 'I am feeling fitter and stronger every day',
- 'It feels good to be outside in the fresh air', and
- 'It's good to know that walking is helping my body to grow strong again'.

Posture

It is important to stand as straight as you can and to keep your head up, with your shoulders back. Holding your head up allows you to take in the outside world, rather than looking inward and focusing on how you are feeling.

We know that posture affects our mood – standing or sitting in a slumped position will affect your mood negatively, whereas an erect posture with your head held up will improve your mood.

There were times when I could only walk if I used my hiking stick; I used a hiking stick instead of a walking stick because it made me feel less incapacitated by my condition. Even though this might mean that I was leaning forward slightly, I still kept my head up.

There was the odd day when I just felt it would be impossible for me to walk any distance other than around the house, so on these days I wore a pedometer and set myself a target of walking 1,000 steps before the end of the day and gradually built this up to 5,000. Occasionally even this was impossible for me to do, but the important thing was that I stayed positive, determined and motivated that the following day I would be able to walk my route.

It was not until after recovering from my other illnesses that I was able to significantly increase my exercise levels, though I still did my exercise routine once I came out of hospital. Because of my wound I was told that I should aim to be able to lift my legs 6 inches whilst lying down after a period of 6 months. In fact, I was able to do significantly better than that. Again, I believe this was because I was sensible but persistent. By this time I was feeling really well and I knew it was time for me to join a gym.

I began with a gentle toning programme alongside an aerobic programme, both for thirty minutes, that I would do on alternate days. Generally, however, I now prefer to exercise daily where possible. I now go to my local gym and work out for an hour five or six times a week. I do very different exercises like Body Combat which is aerobic, Body Sculpt which is toning and strengthening, and yoga and body balance, which are relaxing and stretch out your muscles.

☺ I also love to go walking and regularly walk 5 or 6 miles with my husband – and sometimes much further if I can persuade him.

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If my schedule prevents me from exercising for a few days I can really tell the difference, not only in my physical condition but also emotionally. I know that exercise keeps me physically fit and emotionally balanced – and I love it!

But I am not fanatical about it. If there is a day I don't feel like going I regard this as a signal from my body that it is not right for me to exercise today and just give myself the day off and certainly do not feel guilty. Exercise is part of my life and I intend it to remain so forever, so it is important that I do not allow it to become an obligation.

I realise that for some people exercise in the way I do it is never going to be something they enjoy. If you are one of those people, why not find a way of exercising that is not really exercise at all. There are many ways to do this like joining a dance class, playing with children or grandchildren, gardening – find what works for you and gives you pleasure as well as exercise.

Summary – My Recovery Programme

- I began doing gentle exercise for just a few minutes several times a day
- I combined exercise with periods of rest
- I did not overexert myself
- I increased my exercise gradually but consistently
- I always stretched my muscles both before and after exercising
- I exercised to music which invoked happy thoughts
- I focused on positive thoughts while walking
- I never allowed the bad days to make me feel it was pointless.

Please remember: only you know your own body and your unique symptoms. This is not an instruction manual. You should always consult your GP or health-care professional who is treating you before starting a course of exercise.

Sleep Difficulties

You're the happiest while you're making the greatest contribution.

Robert F. Kennedy

General Information about Sleep

Difficulty sleeping and fibromyalgia go hand in hand. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of people with fibromyalgia experience some type of disordered sleep and feel tired, drained and physically incapable of dealing with the stresses associated with their condition.

Sleep helps to organise memories, support learning and improve concentration. Proper sleep, especially sleep where you are actively dreaming (REM sleep), may regulate mood as well. Lack of sleep can make even healthy people irritable and cranky, affecting the emotions, social interaction and decision-making. Sleep deprivation also affects motor skills, to the degree that it can be similar to that of driving whilst drunk if seriously sleep-deprived. For me this was a major problem and I even had to stop driving altogether for a while.

Sleep and the Immune System

We probably all know that healthy people, especially individuals who are continually on the go, are susceptible to viruses the minute they stop or wind down for a holiday or a break, for example. Many people find they come down with a cold having become exhausted after a stressful event or a big project at work which has affected their sleep. Sleep is essential for the immune system. Without adequate sleep, the immune system becomes weak and the body becomes more vulnerable to infection and disease.

Sleep and the Nervous System

Neurons are the highways of the nervous system that carry out both voluntary commands, like moving your limbs, and involuntary commands, like breathing and digestive processes. Sleep is also a time of rest and repair, so you don't have to be a neuroscientist to realise that long-term lack of quality sleep is not good for your nervous system.

Sleep and Hormone Release

Many hormones, substances produced to trigger, stimulate or regulate particular body functions into action, are timed to release during sleep or right before sleep. Growth hormones, for example, are released during sleep, vital to growing children but also for restorative processes like muscle repair. Some believe that the muscles of fibromyalgia sufferers take longer to repair, so I realised this made getting a great night's sleep even more important.

How do our Bodies Know When it is Time to Sleep?

During the twenty-four-hour cycle of a day our body and brain alternate between states of high activity during the waking day and rest and repair during night-time sleep.

We all have an internal circadian body clock that provides cues and regulates when it is time to sleep and time to wake. This clock is sensitive to light and time of day, so it's important to have a quiet, dark place to sleep and a good bedtime routine.

A chemical messenger called adenosine builds up during the day as our bodies are busy using up our energy reserves. The more adenosine in the brain, the sleepier you will feel and combined with the circadian clock, it promotes sleep. Some people believe that it is the build-up of adenosine at the wrong time that causes the extreme fatigue associated with fibromyalgia – I do not know if this is correct, but once I was getting restful sleep my fatigue reduced significantly.

The Sleep Cycles

There are two main types of sleep. REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is when most active dreaming takes place and is characterised by your eyes moving back and forth, which is why it is called REM sleep. Non-REM (NREM) sleep consists of four stages of deeper and deeper sleep. Each sleep stage is important for overall quality of sleep, but deep sleep and REM sleep are especially vital.

For most adults, seven to eight hours a night appears to be the ultimate amount of sleep required. During this time your body goes through several stages of sleep in a cyclic fashion throughout the night, moving back and forth between deep, restorative sleep to more alert stages and dreaming. As the night progresses, you spend more time in longer stages for dreaming (REM sleep), alternated with lighter sleep (stage 2).

The Stages of Sleep

There are four different stages of sleep:

- Stage 1 (drowsiness) – this stage lasts for just five or ten minutes. It is where the eyes move slowly under the eyelids, muscle activity slows down and you are easily awakened.
- Stage 2 (light sleep) – this is when eye movements stop, the heart rate slows and body temperature decreases.
- Stages 3 & 4 (deep sleep) – this part of the sleep pattern is when you're difficult to awaken and if you are awakened, you do not adjust immediately and often feel groggy and disoriented for several minutes.

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Each phase of sleep has its benefits; however, deep sleep is perhaps the most vital stage. Sound sleep allows the brain to restore the energy we expend during our waking hours. Blood flow decreases to the brain in this stage and redirects itself towards the muscles, restoring physical energy. Research also shows that immune functions increase during deep sleep. The strongest effects of sleep deprivation are from inadequate deep sleep.

REM Sleep (Dream Sleep)

If REM sleep is disrupted one night, your body will go through more REM the next to catch up on this sleep stage.

At about seventy to ninety minutes into your sleep cycle, you enter REM sleep. You usually have three to five REM episodes per night. This stage is essential to our minds for processing emotions, retaining memories and relieving stress. Breathing is rapid, irregular and shallow, blood pressure rises and the heart rate increases. Most of dreaming remains a mystery, but one theory is that dreams may be the brain's way of processing random fragments of information received during the day. If REM sleep is disrupted one night, your body will go through more REM the next night to catch up on this sleep stage.

My Sleep Problems

I would get into bed feeling exhausted and as though I could not stay awake a moment longer. Only to find that the minute I lay down I would be so uncomfortable from the pain in my neck, muscles and other tender points that there was no position that I could lie in that would allow me to fall asleep.

Despite being so tired, I would then start going over things in my mind. Worrying about all the things I was not able to do, about how I would cope with things that were coming up and generally about anything and everything in my life.

Eventually I would fall into a light sleep waking often to try to reposition my body, particularly my neck. The difficulty being that my neck felt better if I lay on my back, but that the tender points on my shoulder blades were too painful when they made contact with the mattress. Every time I woke up I would need to go to the toilet to urinate which some nights was seven or eight times. Then when I got back into bed I would have the same problems drifting back off.

Almost every morning I would wake up feeling like I had been hit by a truck. Before fibromyalgia I had always awoken alert and ready for the day, yet my condition left me feeling like there was no way I could even get out of bed. Prior to this I had never had any trouble getting up and had always been a morning person.

Five-step Formula to Better Sleep

1. Appreciate your day – relax

If you are frustrated thinking about all the things that are wrong in your life, or anxious and stressed worrying about all the things that could go wrong in the future, it is very difficult to fall into a deep, peaceful sleep.

There are two ways that I recommend you use to put yourself in a good mood for sleep:

- a) Spend fifteen minutes making a list of all the things in your life that you are grateful for. When I first ask clients to do this their first reaction is often to feel they don't have much to be grateful for. I think the smallest list I have seen had three things on it. But once we explore this more deeply their lists quickly expand.

There are so many things you can be grateful for, even when you are feeling ill or facing challenges in life. To help my clients expand their list I ask them to think about the following:

- things in nature they love,
- things they can still do with their bodies like see and hear,
- skills and talents they have,
- wonderful experiences from their past,
- family and friends,
- hobbies and pastimes that give them pleasure.

Once we have covered these they are usually on a roll and can find many more things. When you are writing your list it is important that you don't just write them down without thinking about the pleasure they bring you. You should actually connect with the feeling of being grateful for the things on your list.

- b) Listen to a pre-recorded relaxation session.

2. My sleep switch

The aim of this anchor is for your brain to associate the poem, rhyme or prayer with sleep.

- Choose a poem, rhyme or prayer that you like. Make sure it is one that is neutral (no memories attached) or that stimulates pleasant or peaceful thoughts.
- Once you get into bed begin to repeat the poem in your head.
- Repeat it over and over until you fall asleep.
- If other thoughts or worries come into your head, just push them out and start again at the beginning of the poem.
- If you lose your place start again at the *beginning* of the poem.

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- Concentrate on the words so that your mind is focused on the poem and nothing else.
- You will need to be very dedicated at repeating this exercise every night and every time you wake up during the night.
- At the beginning you may need to repeat the poem many times before you fall asleep.
- The more you do it the quicker your brain will associate the poem with sleep and the quicker your results will be.
- As your switch becomes more effective you will begin to fall asleep before the end of the poem.

☺ Within *three* weeks my sleep switch was incredibly effective and even after all these years I cannot say my chosen verse in my head without falling asleep. In fact, I never even get to the end of the verse before I am asleep.

What is your sleep switch?

Your sleep switch is actually what is more commonly known as an anchor. Russian physiologist, psychologist and physician Pavlov is widely known for first describing the phenomenon of classical conditioning (anchoring). In the 1890s, Pavlov was investigating the gastric function of dogs. He noticed that the dogs tended to salivate before anything was actually delivered to their mouths and so he set out to investigate further. As a result of carrying out a long series of experiments, he discovered what he called 'conditional reflexes' – i.e., reflex responses, like salivation, that only occurred conditionally upon specific previous experiences of the animal.

Unconscious anchors

Anchors are stimuli that call forth states of mind, which are thoughts or emotions, and then corresponding actions. We are constantly affected by and respond to automatic unconscious anchors but we may not know what they are. This is because the anchors have been built up accidentally, over time. In fact, we often think that our mood has nothing to do with us and that our moods occur by chance, because these anchors work automatically and you may not be aware of the triggers.

Unconscious anchors can be in many forms – for example, if you have a habit of squeezing your little finger when stressed, if you then repeat this action when you are relaxed, it will stimulate your stress response. In addition to affecting our mood it can

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produce an automatic involuntary reaction. So a certain smell like candyfloss or bacon may take you back to your childhood. A song may remind you of a certain person or holiday.

The first time I heard about an unconscious anchor was at the pain clinic when the clinical psychologist told us about how he was always late getting up for lectures when he was at university and how he got into the habit of brushing his teeth whilst taking a pee. Brushing his teeth still stimulated the urge to urinate twenty years later!

3. A bedtime routine

It is vitally important to establish a good bedtime routine:

- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature. Noise, light, and heat can all interfere with sleep.
- Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Support your biological clock by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, including weekends. Get up at your usual time in the morning *even* if you're tired. This will help you get back in a regular sleep rhythm. This is very difficult when you are feeling exhausted, but I found that once I started moving around, particularly if I went for a short walk, I would feel more alert.
- Avoid naps – napping during the day can make it more difficult to sleep at night. If you feel like you have to take a nap, limit it to thirty minutes before 3.00 p.m. and where possible do a meditation exercise instead of napping.
- Avoid stimulating activity and stressful situations before bedtime. This includes vigorous exercise, big discussions or arguments, watching the TV or playing on the computer or video games. I would turn off all electronic appliances at least fifteen minutes before going to bed, get ready for bed by brushing my teeth, etc., and then do something relaxing like such as reading, drinking a warm drink, taking a bath or listening to soothing music.
- Although this was not an issue for me and it did not require a change in my behaviour, I believe that in order to obtain the good night's sleep it may be necessary to limit your caffeine, alcohol and nicotine intake. Stop drinking caffeinated beverages at least six hours before bed. Although alcohol can make you feel sleepy, it interferes with the quality of your sleep. As nicotine is a stimulant, consider quitting smoking or avoid it at night.
- Train your body to associate bed with sleep and nothing else – especially not frustration and anxiety. Use the bedroom only for sleeping and intercourse. Don't work, read, watch TV or use your computer in the bedroom. The aim is to

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associate the bedroom with sleep alone, so that your brain and body get a strong signal that it's time to sleep when you get into bed.

- Practise abdominal breathing – this means breathing deeply by involving not only the chest, but also the lower back, rib cage and belly; this can actually help the part of our nervous system that controls relaxation. I would close my eyes and take deep, slow breaths, making each breath even deeper than the last. I would breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth, making each exhalation last a little longer than each inhalation. (I did this while reciting my verse.)

4. Awakening with natural light

For me, the worst part of waking up was being jolted wide awake by a blaring alarm clock. Not exactly the best way to start your day! I prefer to use natural light whenever possible to wake up. I find it a very gentle way to start my day and I feel far more alert when I use this technique.

Waking naturally is proven to be the most enjoyable way to start the day, by relying on the gradual increase of natural daylight. However, if you have heavy blackout curtains it's difficult for the light to get in. Also, depending on the time you get up and where you live, there may not be any natural daylight at the time you want to get up.

Nevertheless, there are natural-light alarm clocks available in the market that are designed to wake you up using a soothing, gradual, progressively lightening emulator of daylight that starts dull and gradually brightens so that it feels like you are experiencing the natural sunrise and gradual lightening of the sky. This makes it far easier and more enjoyable for you to wake up, as your body is designed to flow with the natural rhythms of the day. By emulating the sunrise, the natural-light alarm clock works with your body's natural rhythms to wake you up gently.

☺ I never had to invest in one of these because my lovely husband used to open the curtains at 6 o'clock in the morning when he left for work so that I could wake up gradually. I found this a far nicer way to wake up.

5. Meditation

Meditation is one of the proven alternative therapies and can be broadly classified under the mind–body medicine. It is a safe and simple way to balance a person's physical, emotional and mental state, and can benefit anyone.

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The value of meditation to alleviate suffering and promote healing has been known and practised for thousands of years. It has been rooted in the traditions of the world's great religions. In fact, practically all religious groups practise meditation in one form or another.

Benefits of meditation

My recovery began when someone said to me, 'No one could go through what you have been through without it having an effect. Your body has just had enough!'

We all need to take quiet time and put ourselves in an appropriate state to listen to what our bodies are telling us they need. If we are always in a state of anxiety, stress or depression, our bodies will find away to get our attention in other ways through illness, discomfort or sudden emotional outbursts, for instance – mine certainly did just that. I am now very in tune with my body and this has been a vital element in ensuring I remain symptom-free.

As I practised I found these brief moments of calm become very precious to me and I believe they are ultimately essential to my having a happy, healthy life. Life today is often so hectic that we rarely get the opportunity to focus on just nourishing our inner selves. I had become an expert at ignoring the inner needs and emotions we all have. Thankfully, I realised it was time to acknowledge those feelings and allow my higher self to bring me the answers I needed for greater happiness and wellness. You can, too – all you have to do is listen.

☺ Give it a go! You have absolutely nothing to lose and only health and happiness to gain!

As I have explained earlier, we all have our own unique circadian rhythms, which means that during the day (every 60 to 90 minutes) our energy levels take a natural dip and we feel tired. Most people ignore these signals from their body and press on with their day, overriding the natural impulse to rest.

As you have FM or CFS, I guess that you, like me, found these dips in energy so overwhelming that you would fall asleep. The problem for me was that I rarely felt any better when I woke up; indeed, often I would feel worse.

How to begin meditating

There are many ways of meditating; everyone can do it and there is no right or wrong way. The important thing to begin with is just getting started by taking quiet time for yourself. In order to relax fully make sure you will not be disturbed, so take the telephone off the hook.

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My easy meditation only takes seven minutes, so other people can wait. Remember, this is about you.

☺ I am sure you have heard about people who meditate for an hour or two, but in my experience that will not necessarily make the session more worthwhile and let's be honest – most of us would be unable to fit that into our day on a regular basis.

You can start with just two minutes and progress to longer periods if you wish. I found short, twice-daily meditations are far more valuable than an hour every now and again, but you will soon work out what feels right and works best for you.

- Sit in a well-supported chair. The most important thing is to be comfortable so you can relax completely.
- Make sure your back is supported and that your feet touch the ground and are flat on the floor.
- Allow your mind to quieten its thoughts and let the body completely relax.

There are many ways to quieten your mind and body, such as focusing on a simple object. Listed below are my favourites:

1. Focusing on your breathing – slowing the pace of your breathing, noticing the coolness of the breath entering your nostrils. Breathe in deeply, hold for three seconds and then breathe out slowly. It is important to breathe through the nose as the body tends to breathe more rapidly through the mouth when highly active or in fight or flight, so if you are breathing steadily through the nose you will achieve the reverse effect of that pattern.
2. Count down slowly from ten to one.
3. Become aware of your feet on the floor and acknowledge that you are rooted to the power of the earth
4. Visualise yourself walking safely down a very long, beautifully ornate staircase, getting more relaxed as you take each step, going further and further down. Or perhaps you could visualise yourself strolling down a gentle slope towards a beautiful beach, knowing that as you get closer to the beach you are becoming more relaxed.
5. Once you have done some visualisation you can create your own inner sanctuary, a place where you feel safe and relaxed, and the more you use that visualisation the easier and quicker it becomes to achieve a state of relaxation

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under any circumstances. This is your opportunity to play with what works best for you and to really enjoy your relaxation therapy.

6. Music is really helpful and aids relaxation as long as it is in the background and is calming music, perhaps just some gentle sounds of nature. Listening to rock music is exhilarating and unsuitable. Likewise, if it is music that invokes memories that is not suitable, either, because what we actually want here is to slow our thoughts right down and go within ourselves to our inner sanctuary.
7. Once a state of calm and quiet is reached, stay in that place for a while; just remain quiet and go with the flow or introduce some affirmations. The following are my favourites for meditation:
 - I am allowing my body to heal itself
 - I am safe
 - I am calm
 - I am relaxed
 - I feel energised.

If other thoughts come into your head, simply allow them to float back out again.

When you are ready, reverse your relaxation process by counting up from one to ten or climbing the stairs in your imagination, etc. You should not use an alarm of any kind to bring yourself out of your meditation. So if time is an issue, use a guided meditation or play a piece of music that you know lasts for seven minutes so that you will know when it is time to come out of your meditation slowly and gently.

Finish by affirming that your mind knows exactly what it needs to do for you to recover fully from fibromyalgia.

What you can expect to experience

If you listen to a guided meditation like mine, then you may experience various emotions which can come to the surface. This is a good thing, as it means you are releasing these feelings which you may have been holding on to inside for a long time. Initially, you will find that lots of thoughts come rushing into your head. That's fine – just allow them to drift in and flow back out again. Once you become aware of the thoughts, just go back to your positive affirmations. It takes practice to quieten your negative inner voice.

Summary

My Five-step Formula to Better Sleep

1. Appreciate your day – relax
2. Trigger your sleep switch
3. Have a regular bedtime routine
4. Allow natural light to awaken you
5. Meditate to rest and rejuvenate in alignment with your circadian rhythms.

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Pain

Life is like a game of cards.

The hand that is dealt you represents determinism;

The way you play it is free will.

Jawaharal Nehru

Millions of people around the world live with the chronic pain (lasting more than six months) of fibromyalgia every day of their lives. This can destroy their ability to live a normal life and causes stress, anxiety and depression.

The pain caused by fibromyalgia is very real and extremely debilitating; after all, who would want to move about if every time they did it hurt? My tender points were so painful that even the lightest touch was uncomfortable, so I even struggled to rest comfortably. Add to this the muscle twitching and the sore skin and it is hardly surprising that sufferers become depressed.

There are many theories as to why fibromyalgia sufferers feel so much pain. It is my belief that it is caused by over sensitisation of the nervous system, which amplifies and distorts pain.

My technique of dealing with the various aspects of the pain combine the very best of the techniques I tried. You will probably find that, like me, the improvement is gradual. For me, the first thing to go was the general muscle and joint pain and the sore skin. Then the tender points gradually faded and the muscle cramps and tingling was the last thing to go.

Freedom from Pain

Your mind is an amazing and incredibly powerful tool. Every second it receives over one million pieces of information via your five senses:

- Visual – sight
- Auditory - sounds
- Kinaesthetic – touch and movement
- Gustatory – taste
- Olfactory – smell

If it processed all of this information so that you were aware of it consciously, it would be too much for you to cope with, so it filters the information down to about 140 pieces of information. This will be explained further when we deal with the emotional aspects of managing fibromyalgia. But for the moment it is important that you realise that your brain is

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focusing on your symptoms and deleting other information. For instance, until you read this you were probably not aware of the feeling of your shoe on your left foot.

When we have fibromyalgia we are in very real pain. But the good news is that because of the type of pain we are suffering from it is possible for us to tune out from it. There are different terms for different types of pain:

- Short-term pain is called acute pain. An example of this is a broken arm.
- Long-term pain is described as persistent or chronic pain. Back trouble or arthritis and fibromyalgia come under this category.
- Pain that comes and goes is called recurrent or intermittent pain. A toothache could fall into this group, as could fibromyalgia for some patients.

Persistent pain often serves no useful purpose. Many acute pains are like an alarm telling us something is wrong and serves a very useful purpose, like if you were to put your hand on something very hot, for instance. Fibromyalgia does not damage the joints, muscles or other tissues; therefore, the messages are not needed – they are just annoying and distressing.

Pain travels from the peripheral nerves (which extend from your spinal cord to your skin, muscles, bones, joints and internal organs) in the form of electrical pulses to your spinal cord. Once the message reaches your spinal cord, chemicals called neurotransmitters are released which then activate other nerve cells in the spinal cord, to process the information and then transmit it up to the brain. Your mind is like a very powerful computer and sometimes this computer system can go wrong. The messages become confused and the brain cannot understand the signals properly.

There are also good neurotransmitters, called endorphins, which are morphine-like painkilling substances that decrease the pain sensation.

Sometimes, pain can begin very small, but as the signals move along the network it becomes louder and stronger. It's a bit like tuning into a radio station. In 1965 Mendell and Wall termed this phenomenon 'wind-up'.

Pain is never just in the body or just in the mind – it is a complex amalgamation involving our whole being and how our brain interprets the signals. Part of this process is directly linked with the emotional centres of the brain. So if we feel angry, depressed or anxious, our pain will be worse. To put it simply, how we are feeling has an effect on our level of pain. That is why by having a good laugh or exercising, we can strengthen our 'good' neurotransmitters and reduce our pain. Likewise, if we are depressed or feeling down, or we are inactive, we strengthen our bad neurotransmitters and our pain becomes worse.

My formula for dealing with all the aspects of pain of fibromyalgia are intended to interrupt the pain signal, tune out from the pain signal and strengthen the good neurotransmitters.

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There are many things that you can do to reduce your pain, some of which will also help other symptoms and therefore may be covered in another chapter of the book. In this section we are going to focus on five steps:

- breathing exercises
- TAP
- positive visualisation
- thought distraction
- affirmations

Breathing Exercises

Breathing is fortunately completely unconscious and we do not have to think about doing it. However, because it is completely unconscious most of the time we are completely unaware of how we are breathing. Breathing exercises are a great way to release stress and tension. It is sometimes called conscious breathing or transformational breathing and these techniques are often used by meditators as a way to 'inner peace', health and vitality. Transformational breathing is known by many other names – 'conscious breath', 'intentional breathing' to name just a few – but essentially they are the same thing: the conscious use of breathing to develop a very deep and revealing state of inner consciousness.

If, like me, you have suffered from mental, emotional or physical trauma you will have tension from stress stored up in your body. The effect of these negative emotions can be felt every time you move.

Benefits of breathing exercises

As we experience events in life there can be times when we feel threatened in some way. These threats can be real or imaginary, emotional, physical or mental – but they are *all* real to us. Our natural breathing pattern can be changed by these fears.

In the past, if I felt frightened, stressed or worried my breathing would become very shallow and high in my chest. Eventually I would actually experience chest pains and would unconsciously hold my breath in an effort to calm down.

Traumatic events that are not resolved at the time can remain in the form of contracted energy (cellular memory). This in turn can result in illness, depression, aches and pains in the body or in our case, fibromyalgia.

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How to breathe consciously

This very simple exercise is the one I practise. There are also lots of books available on the subject if you want to study further:

- Begin by paying attention to your next few breaths.
- Notice the speed of your breathing. Notice where in your chest you are breathing from. Continue to just be aware for the next few minutes.
- Now pay real attention to the quality of each inhalation. Notice the feelings and sensations of breath flowing into your body. Notice your breath entering your body. Feel the places in your torso that move or do not move with each inhalation. Now pay attention to the quality of each exhalation. Notice the sensations of the breath flowing from your body, the coolness or warmth of air leaving the nostrils and how your shoulders drop slightly. Feel the places in your torso that move or do not move with every exhalation; for instance, the gentle rise and fall of your chest. Now close your eyes and continue to pay close attention to the ebb and flow of each breath.
- As you continue to pay close attention to each breath notice how wonderful each breath can be.
- Continue to enjoy the feeling for a few more breaths.

I love the feeling I get from conscious breathing and the great thing is it can be done anytime, anywhere and it is a great way to calm your mind and body.

TAP – Tap Away Pain

Frankly, many of you will think this is totally ‘woo-woo’, because it will be different from any other treatment that you’ve probably ever used in that it is unique. You may not understand how it works, but most of us don’t understand how electricity works and yet it does not stop us using and benefiting from it.

In brief, a key to the treatment is influencing the body’s bio-energy field by tapping with your fingers on specific points on the body located along energy meridians. Acupuncture taps in to the body’s energy system. This ancient healing system (at least 5,000 years old) is based on the premise that by stimulating the flow of energy along meridians or pathways throughout the body, the body’s own healing network can be activated. This technique accesses the same energy system by tapping some of the identical points on the body into which acupuncture needles are inserted. I found it most effective if in addition I tapped the

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actual point of the pain. The process also incorporates tuning in to the thought processes associated with the pain.

Einstein demonstrated that everything is energy and this technique is based on the hypothesis that thoughts are also energy. The energy produced within the brain can be measured by scientific tools such as an electroencephalography (EEG).

We feel pain because the messages are sent to our brain from other parts of the body. I believe that fibromyalgia sufferers are so tuned in to this pain that it intensifies and becomes unbearable. I believe that tapping away the pain is so effective because it interrupts the signal to the brain and with this in mind I adapted the techniques I studied so that they might be most effective in relieving my fibromyalgia pain.

TAP exercise

When you are experiencing physical pain, perform the following exercise:

- Rate your pain level at the moment from zero to ten – zero being no pain and ten representing the most intense pain possible. Note: all tapping should be done with enough pressure so that you can feel it but not enough to cause you any pain.
- Close your eyes.
- Think about either what you believe was the initial cause of your fibromyalgia (car crash, illness or other trauma) or your emotions connected to the pain you are feeling.
- Tap five times beneath each eye along the bony area.
- Tap the 'collarbone point'. To locate it, take two fingers of either hand and run them down the centre of the throat to the top of the centre collarbone notch. This is approximately even with the spot where you would knot a tie. From there, move straight down an additional inch. Then move to the right one inch. Tap this point five times.
- Rub the 'karate chop' point (situated on the side of either hand) five times up and down – ten in total.
- Now tap the back of your hand – about an inch below the raised knuckles of the ring finger and little finger when making a fist – five times using two fingers of the opposite hand.
- Again, think about either what you believe was the initial cause of your fibromyalgia (car crash, illness or other trauma) or your emotions connected to the pain you are feeling.
- Open your eyes.
- Close your eyes.

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- Open your eyes and point them down and to the left.
- Point your eyes down and to the right.
- Whirl your eyes around in a circle in a clockwise direction.
- Whirl your eyes around in a circle in an anticlockwise direction.
- Say three affirmations whilst tapping the actual point of your pain, (thigh, etc.):
 - I am pain free and well
 - I am fit and strong
 - I am healthy and happy
- Count aloud from one to five.
- Say the affirmations again.
- Tap the spot on the back of your hand again five times.
- Tap the collarbone point five times again.
- Tap the bony part beneath either eye.
- Now, holding your head up, stop and check your scale of pain – and note what your score from one to ten might be.
- Repeat the process for other areas of pain.

Positive Visualisations

Our imagination is incredibly powerful and the phrase ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ is certainly true in the case of visualisation. Have you ever wondered why professional athletes and highly successful people use this technique on a regular basis?

Well, it is a form of self-hypnosis and is a tool which can be used by anyone. By providing positive pictures (creative imagery) and self-suggestion, visualisation can change emotions that subsequently have a physical effect on the body.

Our belief system is based upon the accumulation of verbal and non-verbal suggestions that have been gathered throughout our life based on all our experiences and our interpretation of them. Human beings see pictures on the screen of our mind when we think of things. For example, stop doing what you are doing right now, close your eyes and think of your front door or your car. What do you see? What colour is it? What other detail can you see?

The pictures that we create are not like looking at a movie screen and can vary greatly from person to person. What actually happens when you think of your front door is that you access a memory from your mind. When I consciously visualise I prefer to do it with my eyes closed, which helps me to improve the quality of the image. Even so, they are not sharp images – but this does not make them any less powerful.

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When you visualise an outcome you want over and over again, you build cells of 'recognition' in your memory bank. This serves to help people with fibromyalgia greatly, because it means that you can become consciously and acutely aware of everything that can help you to achieve the visualised outcome that you desire: becoming healthy and pain free.

As explained earlier, everything is made up of energy, including you, and when you continuously focus on an image in your mind, every cell in your body is involved in creating that image and you vibrate and resonate with everything that is in harmony with that frequency, both on a physical and a non-physical level. It is this frequency that moves you and everything that is needed towards you, for the manifestation of the desired image.

☺ I know it sounds 'woo-woo' again but trust me – it works. Many thousands of successful people used visualisations to achieve their goals – so give it a go.

When you visualise, you are directing unseen energy that is what is needed to manifest whatever you desire. Everything that is created is created in someone's mind before it is created in reality.

In healing, repetitive use of positive visualisation allows access to the mind–body connection. This lets the mind and body work together to foster the healing process of the body on a physical level as taught by Dr Deepak Chopra.

When we have an emotion it generates a feeling that turns into a physical sensation. For example, if you are watching a horror movie, you may feel frightened and then get a chill up your spine, the hairs on your arms might stand up, and your hands might begin to sweat. In this case you were getting a negative suggestion through sight and sound (your sensory perception) which produced an emotion of fear that turned into the physical reactions. Visualisation uses positive images to produce positive reactions or emotions in your body.

The brain is a highly efficient system that is connected to every cell in your body by billions of connections. Visualisation targets the right-hand, creative side of the brain to allow you to achieve your goal.

Positive thoughts are essential to producing positive results. Negative thoughts and emotions lower the immune system, while positive thoughts and emotions actually boost the immune system.

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First visualisation

In this visualisation you are going to call healing energy into yourself:

- Think about the gentle the warmth of the sun on a lovely summer's day.
- Become aware of your breathing.
- Begin to slow your breathing, focusing on each inhalation and each exhalation.
- Imagine the warmth of the sun as a healing white light that is entering your body through the top of your head.
- Allow the warm, healing light to flow throughout your body, all the way down through every part of your body and rejoin the earth – repeat ten times.
- Now imagine the warm, healing light beginning from inside your chest. See and feel the light getting brighter and radiating out from within your chest.
- Think of it as a wonderful healing light bringing peace, tranquillity and joy as it heals your body.
- Think about the warmth and brightness of the healing light as it begins to radiate out, spreading throughout your body.
- Allow yourself to feel the joy and tranquilly as the warmth and comfort heals your body, releasing you from your pain.

Repeat this visualisation several times a day – or as often as needed.

Second visualisation

In this visualisation you are going to calm your nerve endings:

- Become aware of your breathing.
- Begin to slow your breathing, focusing on each inhalation and each exhalation.
- Visualise the amazing network of neurons that travel throughout your body from your brain to all your organs and down your arms and legs, all the way to your fingers and toes.
- Notice the colour of this network of life – perhaps, like me, you imagine it is red and inflamed.
- Now focus on this amazing network beginning in your mind and send out a calm, healing colour from your mind – mine was a gentle, calm blue.
- Notice how it starts at the beginning of the network and gradually flows down the channels, like a gentle, healing stream.

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- Allow the cooling, desensitising healing to flow all the way through your body and all the way down to your outer extremities.
- Allow the healing colour to travel all the way to the end of your fingers and toes.

Repeat this visualisation several times a day – or as often as needed.

Thought Distraction

Your mind is always busy and we now know that whatever you focus on you actually get or become. So it stands to reason that if what you think about most is pain, you will actually increase your awareness of your pain and probably the intensity of your pain. There are so many ways to distract yourself and if it brings you relief for even just a short while it is certainly worth it.

Some of them are more effective than others and their effectiveness will depend both on your mood and how bad your symptoms are that day. I am not suggesting that just doing something else is all you have to do not to be ill. But it is important to remember that this is a holistic programme of relief and management of your symptoms.

Ways to distract yourself from pain

- crosswords, puzzles, Sudoku and jigsaws
- music
- a good book
- a relaxing bath
- hobbies – painting, drawing, sewing, etc.
- watching a good film
- relaxation techniques – meditation
- chatting to a friend
- exercise – walking
- grooming/stroking a pet

I used all of the above methods depending on how I was feeling on the day. It was important for me to have a variety of things to do to distract myself because, putting it bluntly, on some days I was just not capable of doing most of them.

Crosswords and puzzles

This is a great way to keep your brain active. As I explained earlier, one of my many symptoms was brain fog, so it was very important to me to exercise my mind and puzzles

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fulfilled this criterion. They were very simple ones and on some days I would only do them for a few minutes. The idea was not to stress myself out thinking about what I could not do, but to just give me a few minutes of brain stimulation. If I only did five minutes, I just congratulated myself on achieving five minutes.

Music

Playing cheerful music and singing along to it will always improve your mood. I had several compilations of really happy songs that made me feel great. I found that by playing them and singing along I could distract myself from the pain and how I felt. The only rule or guideline here is to choose any piece of music which makes you feel happy.

A good book

It is possible to lose yourself in the world of a good book for hours. Because of my symptoms there were days when I was physically unable to hold a book, which is why I chose to release this as an e-book, as well as printed copies. But if I could manage to read for an hour or so it was a good distraction.

A relaxing bath

If I felt just so tired and in pain that I really could not even imagine doing anything else I would have a nice relaxing bath. The emphasis here is on the word 'nice', because it is not distracting to just lie in the water feeling unhappy.

☺ I would have lots of bubbles and relaxing music and would unwind in the warm, soothing water thinking about happy, pleasant thoughts and visualisations.

Hobbies

In an effort to give myself a relaxing hobby whilst I was ill I taught myself to paint using watercolours. It does not matter how much talent you have. Anyone can learn to paint and it is a lovely, relaxing, inexpensive hobby. There were days when I was just too tired or in too much pain to even hold the paintbrush, but on those days I just chose one of my other options.

Watching a good film

This was the distraction I kept for my worst days, when I really was not capable of doing anything else other than lie on the sofa. My world shrank drastically – bed, sofa, bed –

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but I did not just watch endless reruns or depressing reality TV shows. I deliberately recorded great films or series dramas and saved them for my really bad days. So that if all I could do was lie down I would regard it as a treat and enjoy what I was watching.

☺ Fortunately for me, my techniques worked very quickly, so once I started my recovery programme these days were very rare. But I actually found it was a nice treat just to be cosy on a cold winter's day. Once something becomes a choice, your whole perspective changes.

Relaxation techniques – meditation

Meditation is explained in the chapter on sleep. It is a great technique for relaxation and distraction, and can be done for just a few minutes as often as you like.

Chatting to a friend

Chatting to a friend or a family member can be a great distraction as long as you are not talking about your symptoms or their worries. Whilst it is a good thing to focus on the needs of others for a while, if you are the kind of person who feels the need to solve everyone else's problems then it should be avoided. I am sure you do not want to become the kind of friend who only calls to complain about how bad things are, so prepare yourself before the call, perhaps even plan the things you are going to talk about.

Before I started to recover there were a great number of days where the thought of actually having a conversation with someone would have been completely overwhelming. In fact, if I was alone I dreaded the phone ringing because I was just too tired to hold a conversation. But if I did answer it and it was someone who was cheery and made me laugh, and who did not expect witty or stimulating responses, I would invariably feel better after the first few minutes.

☺ Once my recovery was under way I started to call friends and family. I was really touched how thrilled they were that I had rung them for a chat and I realised how I had neglected some of them – thankfully they forgave me. Now, once we get started, I can be on the phone for hours with no neck or arm pain and no fibro fog.

Exercise

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Exercise is covered in the chapter on exhaustion, but if I was in pain I would just spend a few minutes doing gentle stretches and balancing exercises. Strangely not only did this distract me whilst doing it, but it would often actually reduce the pain afterwards as well.

Going for a walk not only distracted me from the pain, especially if I combined it with walking with a friend, but it greatly lifted my spirits.

Positive Affirmations

Before we look at how to use affirmations to effect positive change in your health, we need to understand the power of words and their role in your life.

As soon as we begin to understand words and start to operate as part of a family and a wider society, we absorb words, attitudes, ideas, thoughts, feelings and energies from all around us. Many of these will be negative because we live in a fear-based society.

The things that we hear as we are growing up form part of our early conditioning and this stays with us throughout our lives. Whilst most of us hear positive things as well as negative, sadly it is the negative things we hear and experience that have a much greater impact. Almost all of my clients can vividly remember hurtful or negative things that were said to them in childhood. In fact, many of them were so convinced that they were true that it actually affected their behaviour and happiness for many years until I helped them to deal with it.

Now imagine a world in which positive affirmations and words form the basis of our conditioning in childhood; think how different things would be. Thankfully, as adults, we can easily learn positive ideas. We can use positive affirmations to wipe out the old negative ideas, replacing them with new fresh ones of our own choosing.

You can create your own positive affirmations, but for it to be effective you need to follow these rules:

- Use the first person singular 'I' when saying them.
- Only use the present tense.
- Keep them simple.
- They must be specific.
- They must be said with conviction and repeated often.

For example, if you just say, 'I want to be healthier', that is not specific enough. If you say 'In the future I will not be in pain', it will always be in the future. It is possible to write your own, but keep to one area at a time. In other words, you would not combine 'I am happy and thin' – you would have two separate affirmations. To make it easier for you here are some really good ones for you to use:

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My healing affirmations

- 'I know that my healing is already progressing'.
- 'Every cell in my body vibrates with energy and health'.
- 'My muscles are repairing and healing'.
- 'My nerve endings are calm and relaxed'.
- 'I am healthy, healed and whole'.
- 'I am pain free'.
- 'I choose health'.
- 'I naturally make choices that are good for me'.
- 'I take loving care of my body and my body responds with health, an abundance of energy and a wonderful feeling of well-being'.

I know that some of you will be thinking 'but it is not true – I *am* in pain'. And I understand that, but the problem is that your body and your mind have learnt to do pain too well and what you are doing is retraining your mind.

How quickly the affirmations work will depend on how much conditioning you have to overcome. For instance, if you have been suffering from fibromyalgia for many years and have firmly accepted the belief that you will not recover you might have to repeat your affirmation like a mantra for months, whereas others might notice a difference overnight.

You must be open to the concept that you can change your beliefs and you must also be patient and gentle with yourself if you are to work successfully with affirmations. You might feel silly at first saying 'I am pain free' when you know quite definitely that you are not! But by saying this statement over and over, you are changing your thoughts in this area of your life and the reality of your life will also begin to change.

Affirmations don't have to be said out loud. You can affirm them in your mind and that actually works better for some people. We all have an inner voice and that voice for most of us is very negative. If you think about your inner voice, perhaps you are like me in that before I began to train my inner voice I constantly told myself all day long how tired I was and how much pain I was in. What I was actually doing was reinforcing my symptoms.

Summary – My Action Steps to Rid Myself of Pain

1. Breathing exercises
2. TAP - Tap, Away, Pain
3. Visualisations – one and two
4. Distraction

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5. Exercise
6. Relaxation – meditation
7. Positive affirmations

It may seem hard to believe right now, but I know that through my processes I was able to rid myself from the terrible, debilitating pain of fibromyalgia and I am sure these techniques will work for you, too.

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Emotions

*Happiness resides not in possessions and not in gold;
the feeling of happiness dwells in the soul.*

Democritus

There is no doubt that the emotional aspects of fibromyalgia are very distressing. It is totally understandable that someone who is in pain and feeling exhausted will be affected emotionally. Some people with fibromyalgia get very angry at the suggestion that their emotions, thoughts and behaviour could have any effect on their illness. Often they feel that it is insulting, almost as though it is being suggested that it is not a real illness or that it is a mental illness.

No one knows the real cause of fibromyalgia. But we do know that the way we feel has an effect on our physical wellness and my only concern is how to manage my symptoms so that I can live a normal, happy life. In fact, I was thrilled to learn that I was not reliant on the medical profession to find a cure before I could feel better. For me, knowing that I could affect my symptoms was fantastic news.

It is important to manage your thoughts and feelings and deal with any negative emotions relating to your fibromyalgia. But it is more important to learn to manage your thoughts and feelings in everyday life.

When I was on the road to recovery I was concerned that if I faced a period of real stress my symptoms may return. It was only by learning to deal with my feelings and emotions, no matter how bad things got around me, that I was able to remain well when faced with having cancer. Since then I have been able to cope with many other challenges without relapsing.

We cannot always control the things that happen in our lives but we can control how we react to them. You are in charge of your brain and therefore your thoughts, reactions and results.

Your Emotional State

Have you ever wondered how one day you could spill your drink and it would fill you with negative emotions, anger, frustration, etc., whereas another time it would have no emotional impact, you would just mop it up? If you were with a group of friends having fun it may even make you laugh.

Have you ever wondered how you can witness the same event as someone else yet your experience or opinion of the event is completely different?

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The difference in both cases is your emotional state – confidence, anger, fear, sadness, apathy are all emotional states which change throughout the day and how you experience these is unique to you. Put simply, your emotional state is your mood at any given moment.

Everyone experiences negative states such as depression, anger, fear and frustration at some point and if you are suffering from fibromyalgia it is understandable that you will experience these emotions perhaps more than most.

This is very important because all human behaviour is the result of your state. Most of us are completely unaware that there is an internal process that takes place in the gap between the event and your reaction to it.

Physiology

Although many people know that their emotional state can affect their physiology or normal functions, very few people realise that the reverse is also true and that way we use our body also affects our emotional state. If you sit in a slumped position with your head hung for long enough you will end up feeling depressed, bad posture will increase your aches and pains and your rib cage will start pressing down on the major organs – giving them less space to function. It therefore seems logical that if you use your body differently you will experience your day completely differently.

Six Simple Steps to Save Your Day

When you are in pain and feeling tired the automatic response is to almost curl up into the foetal position, to hold your head down and to withdraw from the world. But the next time you feel like doing this you need to:

- 1) stop running negative programmes in your mind
- 2) stretch, take a deep breath and fill yourself with energy
- 3) sit up straight and notice the good things around you
- 4) sing a happy song that makes you feel glad to be alive
- 5) stand and walk around for a couple of minutes
- 6) shake it out, just move around and re energise yourself.

Anger

Anger can be a crippling emotion and it is one that many of us handle badly. When it is unresolved anger with a spouse, a family member or a work colleague, it can aggravate your fibromyalgia symptoms. Sometimes days, weeks, months, even years after an event people instantly feel the underlying anger if they think of an issue they have not resolved. Once they feel it is too late to go back and address the situation, the anger is coupled with resentment.

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Women in particular often try to suppress their anger rather than express it. At the other extreme, anger may manifest itself by shouting and screaming, which does nothing to resolve the underlying emotion and often simply escalates the level of anger. If you know you are too angry to deal with a situation, it is much healthier to walk away until you are able to still the emotion and then deal with the issue calmly.

Tapping away anger

I had read books about the power of tapping the acupuncture points and experimented with the exercises in them. However, while they had some effect they did not calm me down quickly enough.

☺ People tell me it's my Gaelic and Celtic ancestry.

Thankfully, I was able to adjust the techniques into one that worked for me:

- I would close my eyes,
- rub the 'karate chop' point on the side of my hand five times up and down,
- squeeze the end of my little finger three times,
- tap my collarbone level with where you would fasten a tie,
- tap the back of my hand between the little finger and the index finger five times using two fingers,
- open my eyes
- close my eyes,
- open my eyes and point them down and to the left,
- direct my eyes down and to the right,
- rotate my eyes around in a circle in one direction,
- rotate my eyes around in the opposite direction,
- recite a few lines of the nursery rhyme *Jack and Jill*. (☺ I don't actually believe the choice of rhyme mattered; I just went with whatever came into my head.)
- and then I would repeat the exercise until I felt calmer.

Guilt

Many people have difficulty letting go of guilt. In fact, most women I speak to feel guilty about some aspect of their lives. They may feel guilty about past behaviours or about not being a good enough mother, wife or daughter. If they are suffering from fibromyalgia they will frequently feel guilty about all the things they are not able to do.

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I had things from my past that I felt guilty about, but thankfully I realised my guilt was just self-pity in disguise. If I was feeling guilty it was all about me and how bad I felt about my mistakes! So I decided to take action and deal with it. I believe this was a powerful step that I took to help my recovery.

I made a list of all the things I felt guilty about and then decided where appropriate to apologise or make amends and took action where possible. Then I went through each situation and accepted that I had done my best at the time with the resources available to me. By resources I mean who I was at the time. The next stage was to forgive myself with the firm commitment that I would be a much better person in the future and that I would learn from my mistakes.

Perhaps you can make a list of your own past regrets over which you still carry some heavy emotional baggage. Guilt can be a disabling emotion, often related to events from decades earlier that cannot be changed.

☺ Yes, I did apologise to my daughter and husband for all the times I had been very ratty. There were too many to do separately, so I just went for one *big sorry*.

Forgiveness

Feeling resentful and bitter towards someone is like 'drinking poison and expecting the other person to die!' I don't know who first said that but it really resonates with me. I often meet people who are negative about things and they blame others for what happened in the past which is actually ruining their now, their present moment, and their future.

I had a client who was still angry about her divorce twelve years later. She got herself really worked up talking about how she had not deserved to be abandoned and how bad things had been at the time. What she failed to realise was that she had wasted the years following her divorce because she was more interested in being right and feeling bitter than she was in enjoying her life.

Having been through a divorce myself, my way of dealing with both this and other negative situations was as follows:

- I forgave everyone.
- If I could only pick one technique from this book then it would be this one. I certainly was not a bitter person and I did not feel that I held any grudges from my past, but to forgive was such a liberating and joyful experience that I recommend it to all my clients.

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- I made a list of all the things I needed to forgive people for in the areas of my life where I had suffered harm or emotional pain.
- I worked on the basis that if I remembered it with emotion then it should be on the list.
- I sat down in a relaxed position and meditated on each one, visualising the other person or people involved.
- I imagined explaining to each of them briefly how I had felt at the time.
- Then I asked my unconscious mind what I needed to learn from this situation that would help me in the future.
- Then I chose to forgive them. It really is that simple. We can choose to forgive or we can choose to continue suffering from our negative emotions.
- I worked my way through the list and then I thought about each one again and made sure I could now think about it without emotion.

Dealing with Everyday Life

Whenever we're dealing with bad news, a difficult person or a disappointment of some kind, we can choose how to react to the situation. The problem is that many of us are in the bad habit of reacting negatively, which makes us feel worse. Most of us overreact, blow things out of proportion, focus on the negative aspects and hold on too tightly to the things we believe are important, even when we know deep down that we are wrong.

So many of my clients spend too much time thinking about what they *don't* have in their lives and hardly any time thinking about the good things they *do* have and then wonder why they feel sad, angry and fed up. Then because they are feeling so low and negative, they get annoyed easily and become irrational and frustrated. For people with fibromyalgia, negative emotions drain our already limited energy and reduce our capacity for pain. Then, because the pain and exhaustion increases, we feel even more negative emotions and everything spirals and seems worse; in other words, we lose sight of the bigger picture.

We often take everything on board. We get angry when someone rings us up and tells us about their problem, because we suddenly feel compelled to sort it out for them. Instead of just listening and showing empathy, we immediately feel even more burdened. We could just choose to curtail the call and realise that whilst they have our sympathy, we are grateful that we do not have their problem. We begin to obsess about it and get angry that yet another person has dumped their problems on our shoulders. Resentment builds up and we find ourselves asking: do they not realise that I am ill? Why does everyone expect me to sort everything out for everyone else?

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I know that I have certainly been guilty of this in the past. I have actually heard myself offering assistance when I know I am too tired to even cope with my own life. Then I got resentful when they accepted my help. How can they accept? Don't they realise how ill I am? Well, the truth is no, they don't. No one knows how you are feeling except you. And if you offer to do something for someone else they will assume you are fit enough to do it and that you want to do it.

Stress

There is good stress and bad stress. Some short-term stress -- for example what you feel before an important job presentation, test, interview or sporting event -- may give you the extra energy you need to perform at your best. However, when you worry constantly over your job, school or family events, it may actually drain your energy and your ability to perform well. If you are suffering from extreme or long-term stress, your body and health will eventually suffer.

Understanding your stress level is important. If nothing in your life causes you any stress or excitement, you may become bored or may not be living up to your potential. If everything in your life, or large portions of your life, causes you stress, you may experience health or emotional problems that will make your fibromyalgia worse.

Recognising when you are stressed and managing it can greatly improve both your life and your health.

Research has shown that a large proportion of people with fibromyalgia have had a significant traumatic event in their past and it is my belief that the stress caused by traumatic events impacts on our health in many ways, including developing fibromyalgia.

Lowering my tolerance to stress

I fell into the trap while I was working in the corporate world of thinking that unless I could handle loads of stress I was somehow not good enough!

This is because in our society, and particularly in the workplace, we tend to admire people who can handle stress. Some managers even refer to employees who go home on time as 'not being able to hack it'. It is a ridiculous statement where even if you are doing a great job you are regarded as inadequate if you want to go home to your family. Ironically, it can even be seen as more acceptable if you hang around the office for an extra couple of hours a day even if you are not actually doing anything constructive.

The fact is you will have as much stress in your life as you allow. Stop being afraid of admitting you cannot handle everything, because the more you take on the more you will be given. These days I am often heard telling people 'I don't handle stress well' and I do not regard this to be something to be ashamed of'.

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☺ As you may have guessed, I increased the stress in my life by the unrealistic expectations of myself, being a perfectionist, and by trying to control everything in my life. I am still very determined and focused and have high standards – I've just stopped trying to be superwoman.

Controlling stress levels

What you want to begin doing is noticing your stress level before it gets out of hand. When you feel your mind obsessing on negative events, it's time to stop, back off and regain your composure. You can do this by distracting yourself until you feel calmer and can then assess the situation by asking what action you can take, rather than just going over and over it, allowing yourself to feel trapped. When you realise you are taking on too much and the pressure is building, it is a signal that it is time to re-evaluate things and slow down. Check that you are not trying to cram in things that are not important, and discard things where you can.

Learning to be Happy

To a large degree, the measure of our happiness is determined by how much we are able to live in the present moment and appreciate what we have instead of focusing on what we don't have, without worrying about tomorrow or what happened yesterday, last year or even a decade ago.

For my clients, worrying about past problems and anticipated problems in the future is commonplace. Indeed, most people allow past problems to interfere with the present on a daily basis. This process means that the enjoyment they could be getting from the present moment is greatly reduced, so much so that they rarely experience real joy and often end up feeling unhappy, frustrated and depressed.

All too often people postpone happiness, convincing themselves that some day they will be happy, some day things will get better. 'I will be happy when I've lost weight', 'I will be happy when I'm well' or 'I'll be much happier when the children are at/have left school', etc.

There are several problems with this way of thinking:

- People who tend to think like this find that when they reach their goal or obtain their desire any happiness they feel lasts only a very brief time because they immediately look to the next thing they need to achieve before they feel happy.
- They are missing out on the happiness they could be feeling right now (postponing happiness) because they are in essence deleting all the good feelings they could be having by only focusing on what is wrong.

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- They are actually making it harder to achieve their goal because we know from the teachings of the law of attraction that the fastest way to get what you want is to feel the emotion you are expecting it to bring you now. To put it simply, if you believe a new car will make you happy, you need to learn to feel happy and appreciate what you have now.

In fact, no one has a guarantee that he or she will be here tomorrow. Now is the only time we have and it is the only moment that we have any control over. The past has gone and cannot be changed and we do not know for certain what will happen in the future.

Fear

I lived a vast proportion of my life in fear; in fact, I was always afraid of something, being thrown back into poverty, not being loved, failure, ridicule, not being a good enough person, being hurt, the people I loved being hurt, losing those I loved, etc. My fears reached a critical point after my daughter was born; my love for her was so immense that I found myself spending much of time feeling terrified something would happen to hurt her in some way. Thankfully, I was able to completely overcome these fears and realise that I was a resourceful person who could handle whatever came my way. By teaching my daughter to live her life with a feeling of optimism and happiness, she would be able to attract good things into her life and she, too, would thereby have the capacity to deal with any challenges life sent her way.

Louise Hay states that fibromyalgia is caused by fear and my constantly living in fear will have meant that my brain and body were always on the ready for an attack that may or may not arrive, which meant that I was continuously putting my body under unnecessary stress.

Fear directs and controls so many aspects of our lives that it prevents us from moving forward and damages our health. When we perceive a significant threat to us our bodies prepare for either a fight to the death or a desperate flight from certain defeat by a clearly superior adversary. This can be a very useful tool; however, all too often the threat we feel is not real, it's imaginary.

Fight or flight effects include:

- An increase in heart rate, pumping up to five times as much blood to your arteries.
- Constriction of blood vessels to the kidney and digestive system, effectively shutting down systems that are not essential.
- Metabolism of fat from fatty cells and glucose from the liver to create instant energy.
- The release of endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers. It is actually true that the hero or heroine in an action movie can carry on fighting even when injured because of endorphins.

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So it is no wonder that if you are constantly fearful, stressed or anxious (which is fear in disguise), it will eventually have an effect on your health.

To combat fear, the best strategy is to train yourself to bring your attention back to the present. Mark Twain once said, 'I have been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened.'

My being on constant alert for problems was effective in its own way; whenever a problem occurred I would spring into action and deal with it to remove the threat to myself or my loved ones. Now I am far more relaxed and I have faith in my ability to deal with things if they arise, and because of this challenges arise far less frequently.

☺ My husband has a great way of describing the way I used to be. He says, 'You were like a fluffy bunny rabbit with a machine gun.'

Your Inner Voice

Each and every one of us has an inner voice – the problem is that for many of us it is our biggest critic. We all know how crushing it can be when at a critical moment someone says the wrong thing. And unfortunately our inner critic is always around, and even when it is not putting us down it is increasing your anxiety by being negative. Indeed, the way you talk to yourself can have profound effect on your emotional state and your achievements. As Henry Ford said, 'Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're probably right!'

Do these sentiments sound familiar:

- 'Trust you to mess things up. You're stupid',
- 'Everything is ruined; my whole life is a mess',
- 'This will never work for you; maybe it will for others but not you',
and
- 'I'm going to be ill for the rest of my life'.

Is that how you talk to yourself? The problem being that this is how most of us talk to ourselves all day long and because it is the voice in our head, we assume we have to listen to it and take notice of what it is saying. Even though one of the tasks of your inner voice is to help to keep you on track and to ensure you are making the right decisions, the way it speaks to you should be supportive and constructive, like your best friend.

Notice what kinds of negative thoughts are running through your mind and what you say to yourself that makes you feel bad.

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The following two exercises are how I retrained my inner voice:

1. Whenever you notice your inner voice becoming negative:

- Simply shout '*shut up*' – note that it is just as effective to do this silently inside your head.
- Sing a few lines of a favourite song, or have a positive thought.
- Then carry on with your day.
- Repeat this process every time you start running your negative thought pattern.

2. Or change your negative inner voice:

- Notice the tone that the voice is speaking to you in. Is it harsh, spiteful, and intimidating? Does it sound like anyone you know?
- Really focus on the tone and begin to change it. Make it whatever will sound the silliest to you. This is your inner critic; you can choose to make it slow and sexy or fast and squeaky like a cartoon character.
- Whatever tone you choose, just make it as silly as you can so that it holds no power over you.

Controlling My Emotions

There will always be times in your life when you will have challenges to face. Imagine how wonderful it will be to be able to control your emotions, choose your emotional state, feel calm in situations where in the past you would have been angry or nervous, deal with situations that would normally leave you feeling exhausted with effortless ease.

The following two exercises will help you to cope with any situation that arises. The more you work on them the more effective they will be. By practising them and mastering your emotions before a challenge arises, you will be much better equipped to deal with them when they do arise:

Instant Calmer

- Stand in a relaxed and comfortable position with your head held high.
- Imagine that a golden thread is running all the way up your spine, out of the top of your head and all the way up to the sky.
- Allow yourself to relax, safely supported by your golden thread – become aware of your feet rooting you firmly to the earth.

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- Now remember a time when you felt totally happy, relaxed and calm. See what you saw, hear what you heard, feel how good you felt. If you cannot remember a time when you felt totally happy, relaxed and calm, just imagine how amazing it would feel to really unwind. Think of someone who is always very calm and in control and imagine what it would feel like to be them.
- Next, make the image more appealing by making the colours brighter, richer and full of colour. If there are any pleasant sounds make them louder, but only to a comfortable level. Allow your feelings of happiness, relaxation and confidence to intensify.
- Notice where the feelings are strongest in your body and give it a colour. Perhaps it will be a cool, calming colour or one that you associate with happiness. Whatever colour you choose is perfect for you. Increase the brightness and then allow the colour to radiate out until it has filled your entire body.
- Repeat the exercise three more times, each time adding more details to the event. Enjoy the feeling.
- Practise often to programme yourself to become more relaxed.

Calming anchor

- Remember a time when you felt totally happy, calm and relaxed. Create the image in your mind. See what you saw, hear what you heard, feel how good you felt. If you can't remember a time when you felt totally happy, relaxed and calm, just imagine how amazing it would feel to be really relaxed.
- Next, make the colours brighter, rich and full of colour. If there are any sounds, make them louder. Allow your feelings of being happy, relaxed and confident to intensify.
- When you feel really happy, calm and relaxed, squeeze your thumb and index finger together (either hand). Continue to squeeze for a moment or two while you enjoy those feelings.
- Repeat the exercise three more times, each time adding more details to the event. Enjoy the feeling.
- Now think about a situation where you would want to feel calmer and more relaxed.
- Begin to squeeze your finger and thumb together again.
- Imagine yourself reacting in the way you would want to.
- Imagine things going perfectly well.
- See what you'll see, hear what you'll hear and feel how good it feels.

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- Practise every day and soon you will be feeling calmer and more relaxed.
- The next time you face a challenging situation, trigger your calm anchor by squeezing your thumb and finger together. Concentrate for a few moments and access your inner calmness.

Big or Important Events

Many people look forward to big events like weddings and Christmas with a mixture of excitement and dread. For fibromyalgia sufferers, just the worry of whether you will be well enough to cope with the event can trigger a flare-up. You have to plan, because there are a thousand things that need to be done and there are all kinds of things that could potentially go wrong. What if the journey tires you out too much or puts you in too much pain? For example, I remember going to my niece's wedding and because the journey to the church would take us an hour I was so worried that I would not be able to cope with it that my husband had to take a day off work so we could travel over the day before and stay in a hotel opposite the church; even then we had to sneak off in the middle of the day so I could rest.

All too often we take away much of the pleasure by worrying over how terrible it will be if the flowers aren't quite right on the wedding day or the sprouts aren't perfect on Christmas Day. I know that when my symptoms were at their worst, just the thought of trying to organise Christmas was exhausting. One year I was so bad on Christmas Eve that I could not help put the children's presents out and spent Christmas Day lying on the sofa watching them play while my husband did everything else. I found it incredibly distressing not to be able to get up and play with them or help with the meal.

With this in mind, I think it's really important to give you some practical tips for surviving big events that you can use in conjunction with the other techniques I've given you:

Big-event tips

Write a list of all the preparation that has to be done. Highlight five or six really important things that if they go well will mean you will have a great day, even if other things go wrong.

Give yourself time to make decisions and to get the tasks done. Choose people to delegate tasks to. Take as much pressure off yourself as you can by shopping on-line for some of the presents or food. This can be difficult if, like me, you enjoy looking for presents in person, but once you get into it, it is really easy, a lot quicker and you don't waste money on useless impulse buys.

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☺ Just remind yourself that once you have recovered, you will be able to do all kinds of things again and not have to suffer the consequences after.

Do whatever it takes so that you can relax and look forward to the event. Think about what you really want from the day and imagine yourself laughing and enjoying yourself. Make sure that all your jobs are completed two days beforehand so that you can rest or, better still, book yourself a massage or pamper yourself at home. Accept that the event will never be perfect, so the idea is to make it as good as you can and to enjoy it.

Anxiety

Anxiety is really just fear but perhaps at a slightly lower level of intensity. The following exercise is what I would use if I was feeling slightly anxious – in effect stopping the anxiety before it became a full-blown fear.

- Notice where the feeling is spinning in your body; it was usually in my chest. Emotions are energy, so the feeling of anxiety would be moving. By focusing carefully I could tell it was spinning.
- Notice what colour it is – mine was usually usual dark grey to yellow; we are all different and whatever colour your unconscious mind chooses is fine.
- Notice which direction the anxiety is spinning in your body.
- Visualise it still spinning but moving up your body and out through the top of your head, so it is outside your body.
- Change the colour. I know some people see their anxiety as red and prefer to change it to a calming blue, but I instinctively chose a lovely sunny yellow, so I went with that.
- Visualise it spinning in the opposite direction.
- Visualise it going back inside, through the top of your head, still spinning.
- Allow the lovely calming colour to spread throughout your body, filling you with calmness.

How I stopped worrying

Even though I am an optimistic person, if I had a problem I used to think about it constantly until I came up with a solution. Even then I would continue thinking about it to ensure my decision was right. I felt I needed to go over and over every detail of a problem until I was sure I had not overlooked something. I felt like I had no control over my life, so I was

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desperate to control situations I perceived as potentially dangerous for me or the people I loved; those closest to me.

A big part of what I was doing was the need to illuminate uncertainty. One of the six basic human needs is certainty and for the majority of women, it is the highest need. I used to predict what bad things would happen in the future with surprising accuracy, but what I did not realise was that by doing this, I was actually causing them to happen. To stop myself from doing this and change the inbuilt pattern I began to examine my beliefs about worrying by asking myself:

- What can one actually be certain about in life?
- Was I predicting bad things just because I was uncertain about the outcome?
- How was this actually helping me?

When I realised that I was not helping myself in any way, that in fact if anything I was exhausting myself even more than I was already, I was then able to change it.

Every time I caught myself worrying I would shout 'stop' inside my head. (It's not a great idea to start shouting out loud in the supermarket.) I began to congratulate myself for all the things I had handled well in the past and began to trust in myself.

I began to trust in a higher power to take care of the things outside my control. We all have different beliefs and that is fine, but whatever you believe in – the higher self, the unconscious mind, your higher intellectual or spiritual self, God or the power of the universe – sometimes you just have to let go and accept you cannot control everything.

My top tips to reduce worrying

The 'worry buster':

- Stop labelling yourself with negative names for perceived past mistakes – I'm an idiot, I'm stupid, etc.
- Stop filtering out all the positives – noticing the one thing that went wrong, rather than all the things that went right.
- Stop emotional reasoning – I am really frightened and worried therefore something must really be wrong; I am in real danger.
- Stop jumping to conclusions without evidence; I just know it will go wrong.
- Stop always expecting the worst – my husband is thirty minutes late so therefore something bad must have happened to him.
- Stop generalising based on a single negative experience, expecting it to hold true forever. Just because one relationship failed, you assume you will never be able to

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have a successful relationship. Everything is good or bad with no middle ground. If I can't walk a mile every day I'm not improving.

- Stop going back over the past. Live in the present moment because you cannot change the past and you do not really know what will happen in the future, so dwelling on it only saps your energy.

Summary

Taking charge of my emotions was one of the most liberating and empowering things I have ever done. It literally changed my life. I no longer think the worst is going to happen or spend hours worrying how I will cope with it.

I also no longer assume people will think badly of me. One of my mentors told me that for the average person, 30 per cent of people they meet will not like them for some reason, which could range from jealousy to just not liking the sound of your voice. If this is the case, that is fine because I realise I am no one's opinion of me. But to be honest, I view everyone with an open mind and assume that I am going to like everyone and that they will like me back. This works really well for me as it means I am open to all the good people can bring into my life.

I know that people can change in an instant and I witness it every day when doing breakthrough sessions with my clients, when their beliefs and behaviours change in just a few hours. But please do not be hard on yourself if you cannot change overnight, for your behaviours have been developing since the day you were born. But the more you practice, the quicker and more amazing the changes will be.

Processes for Emotional Well-being

- Ensure your physiology matches the emotional state you want to be in.
- Tap your anger away.
- Recognise guilt as self-pity and send it packing.
- Plan big events but don't expect them to be perfect.
- Forgive everyone – including yourself.
- Have strategies for dealing with everyday life.
- Lower your tolerance to stress.
- Live in the present moment.
- Deal with your inner critic.
- Use the instant calmer to control your emotions.
- Set yourself a calming anchor.
- Use the worry buster.

Final Note from the Author

*'Whether you think you can or you think you can't
you're probably right.'*

Henry ford

You may have noticed that I have divided the book up to cover the four main problems faced by fibromyalgia sufferers and given you techniques to help you overcome them all. However, many of the techniques given within these pages will help the other symptoms. For example, addressing your anxiety will reduce the pain you feel and give you more energy, and meditation and hypnosis will help reduce all of your symptoms.

I am sure you will be wondering how long it will take you to recover, but I am afraid I cannot answer that for you. What I am sure of is that the more diligently you apply my processes the quicker it will be.

For me, the journey may have taken slightly longer than it will for you because I did not have a book like this one, where someone was telling me the steps to I had to take in order to recover. On the contrary, I had to go out and learn the techniques and adapt them for recovery from fibromyalgia. I would suggest you do not put the pressure of a time limit on yourself, but if you want a time scale to aim for I suggest giving yourself six months to recover properly.

I noticed almost immediately that I was feeling happier and more positive, so despite not feeling well every day I still could be cheerful and enjoy life. Furthermore, as I explained in my story, this was even more amazing because I was living through what normally would have been an incredibly stressful period as a result of the house renovations and other illnesses. These happy feelings have stayed with me and increased, so that most of the time I am genuinely blissfully happy.

☺ I am human, though, and I do get lows like everyone else – they're just not as low as I used to get.

My Recovery in Brief

For me, the first thing that happened was that the bad days became fewer and further apart and the flare-ups did not last as long. My energy levels increased gradually as I got stronger and exercised more and my tender points reduced in sensitivity until they disappeared altogether.

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Within twelve weeks I was feeling great almost every day. The only time I felt exhausted was just before my menstrual period. Nothing improved in this sense for about six months, but gradually this reduced to the normal drop in energy levels that many women experience during this time. Interestingly, the last tender point to disappear was my left shoulder blade and the last area in which I felt pain was in my left thigh.

It was approximately six months into my recovery that the growths in my kidney, and then the pancreas, were discovered and then of course I had the operation and MRSA to deal with – and shortly after that the malignant melanoma.

Despite all the pressures of the life-threatening illnesses, operations and financial concerns, when my husband had to resign from his job to care for me and our daughter after my operation, my resolve to recover increased and I remained determined to recover and enjoy my life.

If I had a bad day I focused on the fact that it would pass and recognised that without my techniques, there probably would have been far more bad days.

This marks the end of the book but possibly the beginning of your journey to better health and a fantastic life.

I hope my journey has inspired you and given you hope that you, too, can recover. Please remember these four things:

- your unconscious mind is incredibly powerful,
- you have the key within you to unlock its power,
- many things have been thought impossible until someone did it, and
- life is a journey, so begin with deciding on your destination.

☺ Remember: I am just an ordinary person like you. I believe you can recover – do you?

Until we meet.

Rebecca Richmond

If you wish to continue your journey with my help, visit my website to find out about the ways you can continue to work with me through my:

- distance-coaching programme,
- CD recovery programme with pre-recorded meditations and hypnosis,
- live transformation events,
- one-to-one coaching.

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www.forgetfibromyalgia.com/coaching