

5. It's Ok To Cry

You're mad, upset, scared, worried, don't even know what- but it sucks. It's ok to be all of these. Negative emotions are not only normal, they're essential - especially when you've been handed this news. You're grieving the loss of your life before the diagnosis.

There's a lot of talk right now about staying positive.

Have a positive attitude. A positive mindset. Just be happy.
And it's true. I teach the power of a positive mindset to everyone I work with.

But I also teach the power of feeling your emotions - all of them. And that negative emotions are here for a reason. Suppressing them in the name of 'staying positive' is a nasty cycle to get into. One that leaves you white-knuckling your happiness.

Don't fight the negative emotions, welcome them. Feel them move through your body because that's what they do. Allow yourself to shout or cry or throw a temper tantrum. That's the only way to get them to go away. (Pushing them away or distracting yourself won't banish them for long.) The first time I was alone in the hospital after I heard the diagnosis I took a shower and had an epic cry. And it hurt. And I felt every moment of it. And then I moved on. At the time I thought it was strange how I was gut wrenchingly sad and terrified for a few minutes and then the tears stopped. I could breathe and stand ready for what was next. I thought the crying should have kept going for hours. Days even. But I just had an honest, fully allowed, ugly cry. And when you completely feel it, it's not meant to last for days.

One of my favorite stories is Jill Bolte Taylor's. She had a stroke and temporarily lost the entire left hemisphere of her brain. After a long journey, she has recovered and is writing about her experience (I highly recommend anything by her). She teaches that when you truly allow an emotion, it runs through you in about 90 seconds. When you resist your emotions that they stick around and seem to never leave. Think about when you're laughing. Generally, we don't resist a good belly laugh. How long does it last, really? A few minutes? The laugh will die out, because the emotion is allowed to move through you without resistance.

Think about that next time you feel a negative emotion. That feeling isn't wrong, or something to push away, or going to ruin your happy disposition. It's just meant to tell you something and to be felt. And then move on.

The next time you feel an emotion - positive or negative - pay close attention to it. Where do you feel it in your body? (In your stomach, shoulders or throat for example). Can you breath into it and sit with it, without trying to make it go away?

6. The Internet Can Be Scary

There is great social support and information on the internet. Any tiny question has an answer. But it's helpful to know the internet's limits.

It's very easy to go down the rabbit hole of "This super bad thing that I didn't even know existed has an 80% chance of happening to me". I've been in that hole. There's nothing valuable there.

There are a few reasons why it exists.

Many news and research articles may end by telling you how devastating MS is. I've coached and spoken with hundreds of people with MS. Very few of them would agree that MS is devastating. These articles are often put out by news organizations who rely on the "click bait" of negative, shocking news. Don't fall for it.

Many of the studies that are quoted are old and there are new drugs on the market each year. Articles on the internet can often be either over generalized, or very specific to people that don't have much in common with you.

Ever hear of the placebo effect? That's where someone believes they're taking a super powerful drug and is healed - even though the "drug" is actually a sugar pill with no medicine at all.

Why is this important? If we expect something will happen, there's a good chance it will. If we expect something not to happen, chances are it won't. If we expect a symptom of MS to pop up because we just read that there's an 80% chance of it happening - there's a possibility it will pop up in some form. Even if it's just enough to drive you crazy.

I'm not saying to bury your head in the sand. Just be cautious of what you read. If it's a news article - is someone knowledgeable writing it? If it's a study - notice when it was done, how many people there were and what the circumstances were. If it's an op-ed piece- what's the angle? Is it click bait? If it's someone you're supporting in an online group - know that what happens to them may never happen to you.

We should approach everything we read online cautiously anyway. But when it comes to MS, we need to be extra cautious because it can plant seeds that don't need planting.

Yes, the internet can be helpful, but be wise about it. We need our time and attention for more important things than worrying about something that may never happen.