

Living with Fibromyalgia

Written by Pat Kennedy

I have a condition known as Fibromyalgia. To look at me you would think I look “normal”, but it is what is going on underneath this facade that is the problem.

Fibromyalgia is a sensitisation of the central nervous system. It is responsible for running the bodily functions. There is no known cause for this condition and no cure.

It is generally accepted that Fibromyalgia can be the result of a severe infection, an injury involving the spinal cord and/or STRESS. Getting a diagnosis can be rather complicated and extremely frustrating as the signs and symptoms of Fibromyalgia mimic those of other medical conditions. It is generally a matter of trial and error and finding a Doctor who is willing to listen. From my experience this is not easy.

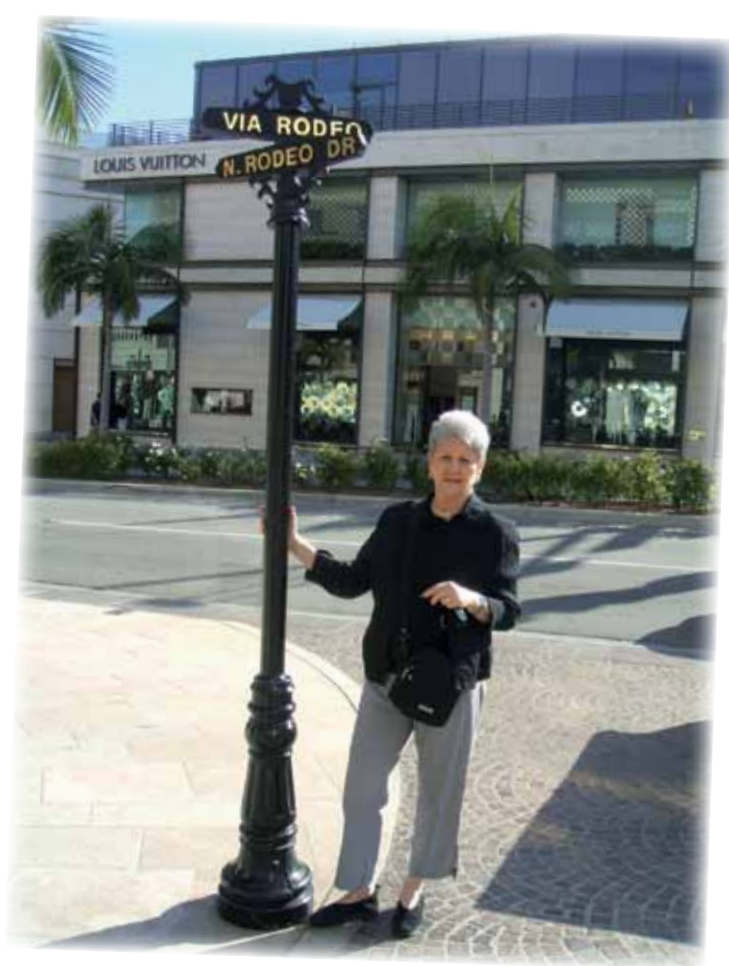
Because Fibromyalgia mimics symptoms of other conditions a series of tests is conducted, all of which can come back as being normal. It is not unusual to be told that you are a hypochondriac. The condition presents with chronic pain, fatigue, and diminished cognitive responses, amongst other things.

In my case, over a number of years, I had had a severe infection, a spinal injury, a brain tumor and plenty of stress. At the time I was working at the International Airport. By the time I realised I was in trouble, the symptoms were well and truly established. I had difficulty walking, was chronically fatigued and having panic attacks. I had a great deal of difficulty getting a diagnosis. Doctors looked at me as if I had two heads and didn't know what to do. In fact one specialist told me I WAS a hypochondriac. I had been debilitated for almost a year and had been medically retired when I heard a doctor speaking on the ABC about a seminar on Fibromyalgia that she was giving for the Arthritis Foundation. The symptoms she spoke of were what I was experiencing. I went to that seminar and after changing doctors I finally got a referral to see this Rheumatologist who diagnosed my condition as being Fibromyalgia. In the meantime, I had been seeing a clinical psychologist of my own accord, because I thought I was going crazy – it was all in my head.

I have to say, this whole experience left me with a low self esteem and doubts. I had come from a medical background and had been a nurse in “another life”. I had always been “in control” of all aspects of my life and here I was wondering how I would be able to “do my shopping”. It was hideous.

So here we are, as a result of that seminar, I diagnosed myself, picked myself up and have been volunteering for the Arthritis Foundation for 7 years. This has given me the opportunity to help others who are in need of guidance in dealing with this chronic medical condition. Many of the people I speak with do not have the resources or the knowledge to deal with something like this. For me volunteering is a bit like therapy. I can once again lead a “normal” life, for I know it is not “in my head.”

Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are the most common of about 150 conditions that come under the banner of arthritis and Fibromyalgia is not far behind. Self Management is the lynch pin when it comes to chronic medical conditions, so the need for public education is essential. The Arthritis Foundation of Queensland hold seminars for the general public and health professionals all over Queensland on a regular basis and do a wonderful job of it.



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CONGRATULATIONS!

