

❖ FIBROMYALGIA

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Although she takes her prescribed sleeping medication she said she doesn't feel it helps and has tried to taper off.

Brenda said she has found massage and occasional chiropractic care have helped alleviate her pain to some extent.

"I try to get a massage at least once a month," she said. "I would love to do it every week or every other week, but it gets expensive."

She has found making some modifications to her routine helps manage the pain.

"I can't go on a long car ride," she said. "There's something about sitting in the car and the vibrations of the road that just kills me. I never really go anywhere. I used to be able to clean my whole house and go to the grocery store and do all the laundry in one day, now I'm lucky if I can get the laundry done. I've found that if I sit on the couch after work I don't want to get up and make supper or anything. I'm just done."

Brenda said fortunately, her husband Steve, is extremely supportive.

"Steve will go to the store and do the shopping," she said. "Walking around the store just wears me out. He'll even pick my mom up and take her to the store to get what she needs. When I go with them, I'm the one sitting at the bench waiting for them to get done."

Steve also built a stand for their washer and dryer so Brenda doesn't have to bend as much to do laundry.

"Just that one change helps so much," she said. "Steve has gotten really good at gauging when I'm hurting and exhausted and just takes over fixing supper or doing a little housework."

Brenda said, although she always has some level of pain, the winter months are the hardest on her.

"When it gets really cold, I really hurt," she said. "I used to always go to all the football games and basketball games. I just can't sit for long periods of time anymore. The last time I went to a football game I bundled up and sat with a blanket on me, but the next day I woke up and my whole body hurt. The doctor said it was because of the cold."

Exercise is recommended for fibromyalgia patients, but Brenda said it is hard to find the right amount.

"I want to exercise to keep muscle tone and loosen my joints, but if I overdo it I pay for it the next day," she said. "I like to swim. The pool really helps because there is no resistance in the water; I'm trying to go to the pool more often. Even if I only walk around in the water, it helps."

Brenda also walks her dog every day on her lunch break. "I try to walk further and further every day, which is easy when the weather warms up and not so easy when it's cold," she said. "Sometimes it's just really hard to exercise as much as I should. When I'm tired from not sleeping and hurting, the last thing I want to do is exercise."

Brenda also has problems with her spine and sciatica, she wears a sciatica belt almost every day and uses a TENS therapy unit occasionally. TENS or Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation is the use of electric current produced by a device to stimulate the nerves for therapeutic purposes. There is no known cure for fibromyalgia, and symptom management under a doctor's care is the only treatment available. The success of such treatments varies from patient

to patient and it often takes trial and error to find what helps each patient. Brenda hopes researchers focus on finding the cause and hopefully a cure for fibromyalgia.

"I hope doctors continue to research the cause and find a cure for fibromyalgia. I think of the future and wonder what kind of shape I will be in physically as I get older," she said. "I wish I could do some of the things I used to do, but I am thankful for the support of my family and friends."

Heather's Story

Heather DeWit of Sioux Falls is a happy mom of two girls, ages 7 and 10, with a caring and supportive loving husband of 12 years. She holds a degree in elementary education and has worked for Lutheran Social Services for 17 years (more than half her life.)

"We are a fun loving and relaxed family that enjoys time together doing a variety of activities indoors and out," Heather said. "My position as the Director of Childcare and Education Services is both rewarding and challenging as I oversee six locations and well over 50 staff that makes a difference in the lives of children and youth in the Sioux Falls area. Both my family life and my career surpass even my wildest dreams."

Heather never dreamt fibromyalgia would be a part of her life as well.

"I have had some of the symptoms of fibromyalgia for most of my adult life and even remember some of the neck and head pain as a child or adolescent," she said. "After our youngest daughter was born in 2007, the symptoms were even more pronounced and I talked with my doctor."

Fortunately, Heather had a very supportive physician who listened to her and, through the process of elimination, they worked together to find what was wrong.

"My doctor is fantastic. She listens carefully in all situations and, when it came to my pain and exhaustion, she did blood work and asked more about my symptoms," she said. "She decided it would be best for me to see a rheumatologist to rule out any other potential issues and confirm a fibromyalgia diagnosis."

Heather said she also had a positive experience with her



Heather DeWit and Family