



Pain: I Get It - Tess' Story

Tess has lived with pain for more than forty years and she tells us how she found her own way after medication and injections didn't work.

I've lived with pain for more than 40 years, since I was 12 years old.

My journey with pain started with endometriosis. Right from the start of my periods I was in absolute agony, crawling on the floor in tears. It was absolutely awful. When I sought help I was just told I was making a fuss about nothing. Then when I was in my 20s I was in a couple of accidents; I broke bones in my back and hurt my shoulder and knee. I developed terrible pain, especially in my back and shoulder and my legs got really big. These are issues I have to this day.

It was much later, when when I was 49 that, after a visit to the Wounds Clinic, a Nurse diagnosed me with a disease called lipoedema. Lipoedema is a condition characterised by an excessive build-up of fat cells. It doesn't respond to diet and exercise and one of the main symptoms is pain. **All those years of my pain being dismissed, starving myself and in earlier years exercising excessively, in an effort to lose weight - when I actually had a disease I couldn't do much about.**

In the last 20 years, I've tried every pill imaginable, but nothing works on me. Neither do injections - the pain I had within 2 hours of an injection was terrible. I was being told I didn't conform. I was about 8 stone heavier than I am now and I had to take redundancy from my job. There were a few years in particular that were really horrible. I couldn't carry on living as I was. I then had to think, what can I do to help myself?

It's taken a long time to get to where I am today.

I came to a realisation on my own that my symptoms didn't seem to respond well to painkillers. For me nothing ever seemed to work. It took me a long time to question my GP and fathom there must be something else out there that would help. I'd begun to think I might need to look outside of 'the norm'.

When it came to work, I hated the idea of doing nothing. I ended up becoming self-employed and started working for the charity Lipoedema UK. I then came across someone who was teaching Laughter Yoga (Hasyayoga). At first I thought it sounded odd, but I was very limited in what I could do so I went along out of desperation. Admittedly it was a bit strange to start with but it really works for me and I've never looked back.

Practising Laughter Yoga has helped me with both my pain and in changing my mindset.

In the past, although I was smiley and friendly and always laughing on the outside, inside I was actually quite depressed and negative. Over the last 3 years Laughter Yoga has transformed the way I feel. I had a gynae operation 18 months ago. I persuaded them to do it with a combination of local anaesthetic and Laughter Yoga. I'm not going to lie, it hurt! But I got through it.





Pain is awful and when you're in it, sometimes you get wrapped up in it and you can't let go of it.

I find that accepting that it can come in waves, with some days better than others, really helps. I still hear people wanting to be pain free. Personally, I have a very full life and I'm happy. But some days something as trivial as the cat brushing against my leg can leave me screaming in pain. You can't be pain free from everything. I've learned to successfully live with my pain. A lot of it is perception and what we interpret as bringing meaning and value to our lives. I cannot kneel and I cannot get up and down off the floor, but I find workarounds. It doesn't stop me doing the things I value. **I actually do more now than I did in the past!**

The pain is still there but my attitude and the way I approach things is different now. For instance, yesterday I leant on my wrist to get something off my coffee table and it became really painful. This morning I got up, went on my vibration plate and did the washing all before my wrist started to hurt. I didn't approach those tasks thinking 'my hand is going to hurt if I do these things', I just did them. Five years ago, this wrist pain would have been the end of the world. I would have been really upset. I would have thought 'I can't do this, and I can't do that'. It was always **can't**. Now my approach is to think '**how do I get round that?**'.

“ You can't be pain free from everything. I've learned to successfully live with my pain ... the pain is still there but my attitude and the way I approach things is different now.”

Tess' top strategies to live well with pain

Allow yourself some flexibility. If I do have a bad day, I allow myself the luxury of saying 'ok, today isn't a great day'. It doesn't mean I can't do anything, but maybe my pain is telling me I need to take some time for myself today. So I end up having a different day to the one I originally had planned. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

When your pain is really intense it's ok to have a go-to strategy. But you're likely to find that **it's a mixture of things that work best.** I think a lot of people are inclined to become reliant on just one thing. One day a hot water bottle might work and another day it might not.

With pain, everything becomes a bit of a mission. I can't just leave the house; I have to consider so many things. Pain can rob you of your spontaneity and some of the fun that comes with it so if you value that then think about a way to put that back in. **Laughter Yoga is what works for me.**

Meditation is fantastic. You don't have to be spiritual or have any specific beliefs. It's about being open to it and having a go.

We don't chose to live with pain, but something that is **your choice is whether you live or you exist.** I chose to live my life. I don't want to merely exist and sit and watch TV and feel bad because of my pain. I can still do stuff. I might have to adapt it but there is light at the end of the tunnel and you can live a meaningful life even if you've got pain.

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