THE BLOG

How Running (Literally) Everywhere **Helps Me Cope With Epilepsy**

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Young jogger running

It was a beautiful morning in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I was running up the mountain to work with a stump of broccoli in my hand. In my backpack, I was carrying a laptop, a loaf of bread, two pounds of apples, a carton of yoghurt, and a fresh change of clothes. No, this is not a crazy dream I had. I was fully awake. Like many people, I often run errands on my way to work. Unlike most people, I take the "running" part literally.

In fact, I run everywhere. I don't drive. I rarely bike. So to get places, I run. In the morning, I run to work. In the evening, I run home. I run to the supermarket. I run to the dentist. I run to a restaurant to meet a friend. I've run from my home to the airport, with a roller bag and a back pack. I run at all hours, day or night. In a typical week, I run about 70 miles.

I haven't always run everywhere. It started one evening more than eight years ago during a work trip to California. After a long but productive day, I went back to the motel. I didn't make it there. Instead, I woke up in the hospital. I had had three "grand mal" seizures in a matter of hours, and I was diagnosed with epilepsy.

Being diagnosed with epilepsy as a young adult is rare seizures commonly start before age 20 or after age 60. And that my first seizure was followed, almost immediately, by two other violent ones was even more unusual. Altogether, my prognosis was uncertain.

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It didn't really register, to be honest. There were medical tests to be taken, dental work to be done -- I had knocked out a front tooth and fractured my palate—, and of course lots of forms to be filled in.

Only when I was back at the motel, alone, did it start to sink in.

I realized that where I thought I had answers, there were only

questions. I was about to move to Santa Fe for a dream job.

Would it be safe for me to live there alone? Would I be able to continue to work long hours, and occasionally pull an allnighter, as I used to do, if sleep deprivation can trigger seizures? Would the anti-seizure drugs affect my cognitive functioning? What would my life be like, if the next seizure could be an hour, a day, a month, or a year away? I felt overwhelmed by all of these questions. I had to get out. I

decided to go for a run. But, as I put on my running shoes, another question jumped at me. What if I had a seizure while I was running, in this town I didn't know, far from my family? Would they be able to find me?

So I sat down, and penned down a detailed description of

where I planned to go, and when I expected to be back. Then, I stepped out in the dark, and ran.

I had long been an enthusiastic runner. I ran about 40 miles per week, and had completed my first marathon the previous year. But I increased up the mileage considerably over the following months. I needed to. People who have had a seizure in the recent past are prohibited from driving. And my doctor felt that even biking would be too risky in my case. So, I just ran everywhere, even if that meant running a half marathon to get some paperwork done on the other side of town.

But that wasn't the only reason I ran. When you're first diagnosed with epilepsy, the big question is, will it be possible to control the seizures? The answer determines whether you can live alone safely and whether you can have a demanding career -- all things that I had taken for granted up to that point. You won't learn the answer until after a couple of months. If you don't have a seizure the first week, then perhaps you won't have seizures on a weekly basis. If you don't have a seizure the first month, then, wow, perhaps you won't have them every month. And so on.

Running has taught me to not be afraid. To embrace what comes. To define myself.

Running became my coping mechanism. Running meant pushing past pain. I've tripped and fallen many times. In the dark. On rocky trails. On the hard pavement. I felt that if I could push past pain, then perhaps I could push past uncertainty.

Running also meant independence. Sure, I couldn't drive. But I figured that if I'm creative and if I plan well, then I can do almost everything that other people can. Running meant I could rely on myself, no matter what.

Most of all, running meant having a choice. Do I define myself

by what I couldn't do, or by what I do? Running up the

mountain with my groceries became a source of pride.

I occasionally have seizures, at unpredictable times.

Overall, I've been lucky. I didn't have a seizure that night in California, and I made it back to the motel safely. While the prognosis looked quite bleak initially, it gradually became clear that my seizures can largely be controlled with medication. I work my usual long hours, and I can bike now. I'm even legally allowed to drive, though I don't do so because

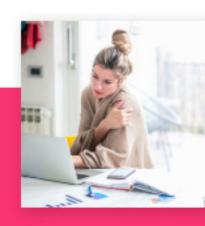
I still run everywhere, even if I don't need to anymore. It turns out that my epilepsy hasn't defined me, but running has. I cannot imagine my life without it. Running has taught me to not be afraid. To embrace what comes. To define myself. Even if people think I look silly running with my broccoli stump.

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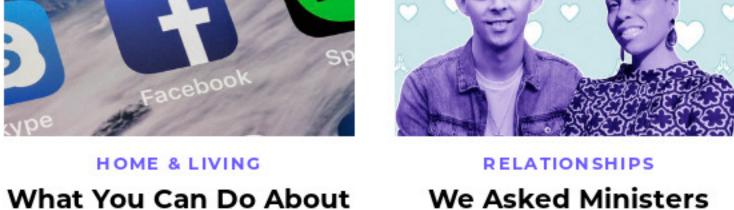






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