Being Happy with Hepatitis C

November 26, 2013 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Living with hepatitis C is a call to action. Hepatitis C reminds me that I can surrender to illness or pursue happiness and health. Cultivating happiness is like taking a daily vitamin - it is cheap insurance. I can't prove that it helps me, but it sure does feel good.

Most of us probably buy the notion that happiness is good for our health. The problem is that happiness is not something you can just turn on or off. Even worse, if you want to be happy but you aren't, life can feel extra miserable.

If you don't feel happy, what can you do? First of all, don't beat yourself up for not feeling content. Your attitude is a tool to help you, and never to be used against you. The Dalai Lama said, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Extend this compassion to yourself. If you are on hepatitis C treatment, it may feel nearly impossible to be happy, but you can be gentle with yourself.

Next, be sure your lack of happiness is related to your attitude and not a psychiatric illness. Mental illness is a medical problem needing professional help. Willpower is a powerful ally, but it doesn't cure mental illness. The same is true if you are taking hepatitis C medications, such as peginterferon. Determination may help you get through treatment, but it may not help you manufacture a better mood.

There are simple ways to improve a sour mood. One strategy is to "act as if." Deciding or pretending to be happy can actually improve your mood. Try acting like a contented person and you may be surprised by the results. Even a fake smile generates positive neurochemicals.

Another mood improver is to count your blessings. Even when life is at its lowest, most of us can find something for which to be grateful. If you are reading this, then at least you have electricity, eyesight, and the ability to read. Those are worth something.

Wishing you a happy, healthy Thanksgiving.

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