

A Cruel Companion

Category: Chronic Pain

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | November 2, 2025

Pain has been my constant—and cruel—companion for eighteen years. My suffering when bone was hitting bone in my left jaw led to the first of five maxillofacial surgeries. None worked, even when I had radiation to prevent more bone growth. I have had Botox, acupuncture, physical therapy, medication—but nothing alleviates the pain that radiates from my jaw to my ear, eye and head. The prosthetic device in my head prevents me from opening my mouth to any great extent; going for a dental cleaning is excruciating, while having dental X-rays is impossible.

Living with chronic pain is exhausting. I use so much energy to deal with the pain that I have little left to engage in the activities I enjoy—going to the theater, taking classes, even reading a book. As a person with a proclivity towards depression, the pain makes it all too easy for me to fall down the rabbit hole. It makes my innately pessimistic nature an even darker one. Pain lessens my quality of life. I cannot interact with others while wearing a gel pack face wrap, after all.

At this point in my life—I am 78—I tell myself that my situation could be worse. I could have stage 4 cancer, ALS, or dementia. I hear stories about how other people cope with situations much more severe than mine, and I am ashamed by my weakness for complaining. I feel guilty when my phone conversations with my children end up as self-pity parties for me.

My physicians have told me that no remedies remain for me. The pain I have today will be with me tomorrow and for all the tomorrows to come. It is my challenge to learn to deal with it—to accept it as a fact of my life—and not let it consume me. That, of course, is easier said than done. In the meantime, I alternate putting hot and cold packs on my temple and jaw. And I try to maintain some semblance of calm in the face of the chronic pain storm.

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