

# SELF CARE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

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# Introduction



My histamine issues have been mostly at bay for roughly 6 or 7 months now, yet I'm still struggling with so many of the same mental symptoms, in addition to chronic pain. When I'm in this place, I've learned that I need to remove potential triggers as thoroughly as possible and replace them with a calming environment.

I've been in this overstimulated headspace so many times over the last five years that I've even developed a routine. While I've been able to work with my doctor to find a combination of neural rewiring and anti-inflammatories to mostly calm my system over time, not everybody is in that place right now.

Sometimes you only have an hour to yourself to re-center before the kids get home from school or your spouse needs your help with something. So take the time you do have and carve out a portion of it for self-care, which basically means focusing on your own well-being and relieving some of that chronic stress.

# Introduction (cont.)

While right now my histamine issues come & go with stressful times, as long as I stay on a low-histamine diet, I have much more control over all my symptoms than anything else I've done. This allows me to do two things, broad in scope & possibilities: process and heal.

The processing portion of this refers to the mental side of things for the most part, while the healing side is both mental and physical. It's important that you mix the ways you mentally process & deal with your illness with those that allow you to heal from and prevent flare-ups.

These ideas won't work for everyone, but these are the things I've been doing for myself to heal from flare-ups, big and small. If one of your symptoms is this horrible up & down anxiety, as I get, it can be very guilt-inducing to take time out of a busy schedule to care for yourself.





There's so much to do!! But you can't function without YOU. Even if it means prepping one fewer ingredient or eating freezer food or finishing one less task today, take the time to heal.

YOU should enjoy your meal, and your life. Your illness does not dictate your happiness.

You are  
important.  
You must  
believe  
that,  
above all.

# PROCESSING YOUR CHRONIC ILLNESS



**Allow yourself to grieve.** Everybody has a different way of grieving, but it's an important part of dealing with your diagnosis, no matter how long-term its scope is.

# PROCESSING YOUR CHRONIC ILLNESS *(cont.)*



**Write in a journal,** not just about what you've eaten or what your symptoms are, but about what you've been doing lately to enjoy yourself and what other things give you happiness. Take that as a place to grieve, to mourn the loss of normalcy (beyond the pandemic). This doesn't have to be a flare-up-only thing, or a daily or weekly thing.

But writing can be a fully immersive activity, and give you space to process your illness and its effects, as well as give your body time to heal on its own, without the aggressors of food and environment. This website is my journal, actually, and often I'm working on posts (some private and some made public, like the recipes) while I listen to some calming jazz, blues, or folk music.

# PROCESSING YOUR CHRONIC ILLNESS *(cont.)*

**Take a warm shower** with calming essential oils (that don't irritate your senses). Try an epsom salt bath (test it with a 5-minute hand soak, then a 10-minute foot bath before going all-in on a regular bath with 1 cup of salts). Do something that puts you near warm water where you can focus on yourself and think more clearly.

**Color or draw a picture,** like you did when you were a kid. Play. Practice a completely new, fully mind-occupying activity that allows you to clear our mind and center yourself, corny as it may come off, if you're mid-flare up. Write a quick letter or a postcard. Nostalgia for times when you were, quite frankly, happier, is a tool you can use to put yourself in a more positive mindset, and looking at old pictures can help this.



# PROCESSING YOUR CHRONIC ILLNESS *(cont.)*

If you're usually into watching television, maybe **try some 1080p driving videos**; you can watch an assortment of road trips all across the globe. If you get car sick, both the Insight Timer app and the Calm app have lots of free calming soundscapes you can meditate or fall asleep to.



**Limited Sensory Play.** This is a more unusual approach, actually similar to what toddlers and infants do, but the idea is that you expose yourself to only one sense at a time. For example, sitting in a dark, quiet room with no strong smells, actively feeling the textures in the world around you, down to the clothes you're wearing and the feeling of fabric on your fingernails.

# PROCESSING YOUR CHRONIC ILLNESS *(cont.)*

Or even sitting in that same dark, quiet room with cotton pajamas on, carefully opening & closing different bottles of essential oil. The idea is to distract your mind from the anxiety and refocus it on more productive, or even just less destructive behaviors. I've read about this as a unique type of meditation, and as someone who deals with a racing mind most every day, I found this to be a good introduction to meditation without the frustration.



## HEALING YOUR MIND & BODY

You absolutely must find the root cause of your histamine intolerance. If you don't immediately know or find out, first start by changing your diet and then go down the list of root causes of histamine intolerance, starting with the most common: mold exposure. But while you're on your direct healing journey, you can also treat any lingering symptoms by supporting your body:

# HEALING YOUR MIND & BODY *(cont.)*

**Cook!** It can be meditative to chop veggies, but it's also a beautiful thing to take control over what goes into your body. Try to buy organic whenever possible, but food and mindset are truly your biggest tools when healing with a chronic illness.

**Add** healing supplements into your diet, alongside whole foods that you know you tolerate well. Unfortunately, tolerance is so individual that this will be a process for you to undergo by yourself, but you'll feel the effects quite quickly.

As for supplements, natural anti-inflammatories like turmeric, quercetin, and vitamin C can make a huge difference when added to your meal. Also consider liver-supporting supplements, like milk thistle and N-Acetyl-Cysteine, to speed up your body's detox. Please don't add in more than one supplement at a time, and always talk to your doctor first!



# HEALING YOUR MIND & BODY *(cont.)*

**Try some “alternative” healing options,** such as a castor oil pack, an epsom salt bath, or even just a good cry. It’s been proven that stress-related hormones are released in your tears, having a cathartic effect on a cellular level.

**Invest in yourself.** If you’re like me, and used to basically reward yourself with food and nothing else, it’s time to expand our horizons. I still have to stop myself from shopping for chocolate when I’m sad, but I have managed to find ways to enjoy treating myself to food. For example, I’ve got my daily coffee ritual down, and I’ve been working on a dessert recipe my body can tolerate.

I have 4 or 5 quick meals I like to make & eat, and every week or two, I experiment with a new low-histamine ingredient I order online. Last week I even made coconut milk ice cream! But some other ways to invest in yourself are with self-care items, books, new clothes, lessons for things you’ve never thought to try, and even just some time off work. Buy your own time back, instead of a cake or a steak.



# HEALING YOUR MIND & BODY *(cont.)*

## **Work on your breathing.**

I have found alternate nostril breathing to be incredibly calming, and I practice it for five minutes each morning and night.

## **Jump into a fun new project**

that physically engages you as much as you're comfortable with. This is partly for your mental health, but also your mental fitness, especially if you get bad brain fog. Whether that means baking cookies or building a new deck or making music, know your limits and work within them.

Keep yourself in focus here, and take on a project that's pure enjoyment rather than whatever seems useful. Some other ideas include knitting, reading through a list of classics, and starting a window herb garden. This act of distraction through enjoyment can give your mind a break from worrying about foods you can't eat or your next attack, and releases "happy hormones" which will better equip you for doing all other acts of healing.

These aren't to say that I don't also cry (therapeutically) a couple times a week.



## *Some final words*

You are not alone. Nearly three years ago I tried the low histamine diet as a last-ditch effort to get rid of the reflux and at the time, severe stomach pain, but it also got rid of my insomnia, severe anxiety, and mild depression. (Well, some of those come back intermittently, and the ongoing pandemic has not helped with my depression.)

For me, the mental symptoms slowly pile on over the course of a few days and then weeks, beginning with mild anxiety. That then gets more severe; I start being unable to sleep, and my thoughts get more scattered and my emotions more severe, with my deepest insecurities flashing into my brain at almost all times, like waking nightmares. It's worst at night, when I'm just trying to sleep and the flashes come harder. It hasn't been like this for me in awhile.

Reactions like these sneak up on you & build up over time, and quite frankly, they really suck. Often they're also actually harder to manage since they're so slow-moving. But I just want you to know that I am so sorry you're going through this.

You don't deserve to bear this burden. I mean, I'm certainly not perfect, and some days I just wanna turn my problems off and get lost in a TV show all evening. That's okay, and sometimes that is exactly what I do. But many of us have families to care for, multiple jobs to juggle, and a social life to consider.

**DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?**

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