

# Techniques to Help Us Make Changes

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In 1995, I wrote an article called “Changing Your Life by Conserving Energy.” In it, I listed three techniques from an article by Sybil Kohl. Her techniques have helped me to make healthy choices and prevent further pain and weakness. Kohl<sup>1</sup> suggests three techniques that we could use to help ourselves make changes. These are push to avoid pain, blank pad and plain talk.

The **push to avoid pain** system acknowledges the amount of energy that we must generate in order to reduce our activity level. It is a statement of action, not of failure or backing down. It means that we are dedicated to taking care of ourselves. To use respiratory equipment is an action with enormous consequences; to retain authority in a seated position requires great assertiveness. Other people, obligations and commitments will be prioritized according to pain thresholds and those actions that reduce pain. Taking care of ourselves is not giving in, but rather a restatement of control. The pain will not control us; we will control the pain.

The **blank pad** method of documenting accomplishments during the day reinforces a sense of purpose. Instead of making lists of things to be done and then crossing off what has been completed, use a blank pad to record all you have done. It is a great training exercise for developing awareness of the energy expenditure that does occur. It also saves us from devaluing ourselves for that which was not done. The goal is to avoid negative feedback at the end of the day and replace it with positive feedback.

**Plain talk** was developed in response to people asking how to keep from feeling manipulated. If someone does not respect a simple “No” in response to a request, we may have to ask ourselves, “Why do you want me to be in pain, more tired, over-extended, not able to enjoy our time together, etc.?” We need to practice simply worded responses that will increase the other person’s awareness

of the impact of their requests without creating defensiveness.

In addition, I have discovered the following three techniques that have proven to be beneficial to me in managing my health. These are meditation, working to time and taking care of myself first.

**Meditation** helps you to rest regularly. While setting aside a few 15- or 20-minute breaks to do nothing but rest each day made me feel as if I was giving in, meditating during those times makes me feel as if I am doing something positive for myself. It is possible to meditate in any position, and if I fall asleep while meditating lying down, I realize that my body probably needed the rest. I found it best to start with concentration mediation and work up to insight meditation. In addition to taking the rest breaks that you need, you will add a new facet to your life.

**Mavis Matheson, MD**, had polio in 1952. She led a full and busy life until she developed post-polio weakness and fatigue 40 years later. She practiced medicine until 1993, and designed and maintains the Polio Regina website (<http://nonprofits.accesscomm.ca/polio>) and library, and is involved with Regina Insight Meditation.

**Working to time** helps me to feel a sense of accomplishment even if I'm unable to complete the entire task. How often do you find yourself worn out before a job is done but push ahead to finish it? The technique of working to time helps me feel a sense of completeness even if I am unable to finish the entire project. When first practicing this technique, I find it helps to set an alarm to keep track of the time while you are working. If you start an activity with a plan to work for 20 minutes, you can feel you've accomplished what you set out to do when you've worked for 20 minutes. After a while, you'll be able to judge your fatigue level and determine approximately how long to stay at an activity.

### **Take care of myself first.**

At first glance this may sound selfish. Although, it is our nature to care for

others, first we must care for ourselves. On an airplane, when the oxygen masks drop down, we are told to secure our own masks before trying to help the child traveling with us. In stressful situations, I try to stop, identify and manage my needs. When I am able to do this, my family appreciates not having to guess what I require. By taking care of my own needs first, it helps to eliminate worry, stress and anxiety.

Energy conservation helps us feel better and do more with less. As we continue to change physically, our old coping strategies may not work and we must make adjustments to fit our needs. We are responsible for what we do. Only we can make the decision to take control and take care of ourselves. ▲

### **Reference**

1. Kohl SJ. *Emotional Responses to the late effects of poliomyelitis*. In Halstead LS, Weichers DO, eds. *Research and Clinical Aspects of the Late Effects of Poliomyelitis*. White Plains, NY: March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation; 1987: 135-143

## **Try a Cane**

Did the article, "Fear of Falls, Risks and Practical Strategies" in the last issue of *Post-Polio Health* ring true? If so, here are a few tips on selecting and using a cane, which you can purchase at a local drug store or a medical supply store. Some insurance plans will cover the cost of a cane.

### **What is the proper length of a cane?**

You should be fitted for your cane in your walking shoes. The general guideline for adjusting or cutting the length is that your elbow should be at a comfortable 20-30 degree angle with the cane in your hand. Or, with your arm hanging straight down at your side, the top of your cane should come up to the crease in your wrist.

### **Which hand do I carry the cane in when I walk?**

Generally, a cane is carried in the hand opposite the weakened or painful leg. This position widens your base of support, giving you greater stability, and should help you to walk more naturally and be less tiring. However, if the opposite arm is also weak or painful, you may need to use the cane with the same-sided hand. ▲

For Canes and Cane Accessories, visit [www.abledata.com](http://www.abledata.com) > products > walking. Select "canes accessories" and/or "canes general."