

Take action, face the challenge, never give up

By Katy Yoder
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Losing weight sure isn't for wimps. Since I began slimming down, I've had three anxiety attacks and multiple sleep terrors that cause me to wake up screaming ... not an easy thing for my poor husband to handle! I'd never had anxiety attacks before, but the sleep terror disorder has plagued me since childhood.

I knew I was uncomfortable when I lost weight in the past but the feelings were elusive, striking with no warning and then disappearing into the uncharted territory of my subconscious. I never stopped to consider why I felt concern when my pants began to get baggy and the body of my youth began to reemerge.

Often, I was frustrated and frightened simultaneously. When I got on the scale and didn't see a drop in weight I was angry and felt cheated. I followed whatever diet plan I was trying at the time and rarely saw results. But when I did begin to lose weight, I had a foreboding feeling with

no apparent reason. I never considered questioning these vague thoughts. That seems to be one of my problems, sometimes I take my thoughts too seriously; other times I don't take them seriously enough. I didn't know how to tell the difference between mindless mental chatter and unresolved trauma that sometimes bobbed to the surface for a quick look around before sinking back into oblivion.

But the anxiety attacks have brought a blurry past into sharper focus, offering an opportunity for me to grab elusive memories and stare them in the face. I didn't realize just how much my subconscious doesn't want to offer up the answers I need to heal. I've gone much farther down the rabbit hole this time, and sometimes it's scary. I don't know what's around the next corner and how my body will react.

I wonder if all this buried, toxic stress had anything to do with my breast cancer? I know that stress can play a role in diminishing the immune system, making me vulnerable and more

susceptible to cancer cells. Now that cancer is behind me, I will do whatever it takes to keep it at bay. I've changed my diet, I'm exercising more and I take daily supplements. But the subconscious stress is still there.

I've been seeing a therapist for the night terrors, which turned out to be a really good thing when I had my first anxiety

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attack. It was so nice to have someone in my corner who could explain to me what happened and give me some tools to use if I had another one. I was really hoping that it would be a one-time occurrence but that wasn't the case. It's a strange feeling to wonder when another one might happen.

In some ways it's similar to the migraine headaches I get sometimes. There's usually some kind of trigger and often a tiny indicator that one is imminent. Migraines are something I've learned to live with, and I know what to do when one hits. Anxiety attacks were uncharted territory and the first one was so scary my co-workers called 911.

The EMT staff were so helpful. They calmed me down, helped me to breathe and regain feeling in my arms and legs. They reassured me I wasn't having a heart attack and gave me advice about what to do if it happened again. I have family members and friends who have anxiety attacks but I never thought I'd have them too. It has given me a new appreciation and empathy for what they have gone through. Recently, I heard something on the radio saying that anxiety attacks are a mental illness. That felt scary. Me?! I'm sure that's why it isn't talked about much. I think there's a degree of shame attached to it. Maybe a sense of weakness or brokenness that most don't want to admit to

feeling. But what if it's more like the canary in a coal mine?

It's way too easy to ignore what's been eating us for years. I know I've stuffed my emotions with food and television. When I'm checked out, I don't feel. But what's out of mind isn't gone, just waiting. For me anxiety attacks are a way for my subconscious to say, "I'm done waiting for you to admit I'm here and I need help." My desire to avoid another one is a powerful motivator. But...I refuse to give up my quest to lose weight and be healthier! So the only option is to face the fear losing weight has unearthed, and finally release it.

At work when we're trying something new and feeling resistance, a wise consultant offered these simple words, "It's a process." When I feel like I'm going backwards or tiptoeing over dangerous ground, I remind myself that it's a process that doesn't always move in the right direction all the time. The important thing is I'm taking action, facing the challenge and never giving up.

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