

MOVING
THROUGH THE
GRIEF OF
Chronic Illness



My Story.

In October 2014 after almost 8 weeks of what I thought was a very bad flu that kept getting progressively worse, I was officially diagnosed with Hashimoto's Thyroiditis with a TSH of 164. I was physically and cognitively disabled, barely able to think, talk or care for myself.

You can see from this picture taken in July that year the puffiness and fluid in my face. I had gained a huge amount of weight that my diet and lifestyle could not explain but I still felt "normal" for me.

At diagnosis, my kidneys and liver were at less than 50% function, my body was full of fluid and inflammation and every single part of me ached, from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. My vision was blurry, I had constant, loud tinnitus, my hair was falling out and I was suffering rolling anxiety attacks that none of my therapeutic techniques could calm me from.

I did not look or sound like "me" anymore. The symptom of "air hunger" made it feel like I could not get enough oxygen into my lungs, I had chest pain, heart issues and felt like I was dying. My voice was deeper and slurred. To speak I had to focus on getting enough air to push the words out through my lips. I could feel the energy it took to think and digest and talk.

I was dangerously ill, disabled and had no idea if I would live, how I would live, if I would recover and what sort of recovery was even possible for me. My then doctor's only advice was to "take my little tablets and adapt to my new normal." I went from being an independent, capable, intelligent, self-employed, sole parent of two who loved her job and her growing business as a clinical hypnotherapist, counsellor and life coach, to planning for my worst case scenario if I could not recover. This would mean giving up our rented home, putting all my things in storage, having my youngest son move in with his Father and me moving in with my then 77 year old Dad.

Quite literally my whole world fell apart. There was massive amounts of information on the internet about Hashimoto's, autoimmune disease and disease progression from a medical perspective. There was nothing out there about how to adapt emotionally and psychologically to the many unknowns of progressive autoimmune disease. Emotional Autoimmunity was born from my own needs as an individual and as a therapist, to seek and find emotional and mind shift strategies to help me adapt to the ongoing challenges of my new life with multiple autoimmune diseases which are Antiphospholipid Syndrome, Hashimoto's Thyroiditis and Celiac Disease.

The original "Stages of Grief" model by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was created for people trying to find acceptance for their terminal illness and the emotions they experienced through that transition. So many people have attempted to adapt this model to the stages of grief for chronic illness but it does not fit. Chronic illness has a life changing impact and unique emotional and physical challenges that are not recognised or acknowledged in the fields of Medicine or Psychology. However in general, chronic illness does not result in death though it can certainly lead to disability and shorter life spans. Our challenge as people living with chronic illness, is to continue to live as best we can with very little understanding, acceptance or validation of the massive changes and complex emotions that the diseases have made to our lives.

I created my own model for the emotional stages of chronic illness from pre-diagnosis to acceptance and resilience, to help fill the void in the psychological and physiological literature on the process of moving through the grief of chronic illness and to help you find the best possible life, health and happiness available to you now.

I sincerely hope that it gives you some much needed support and validation. Kerry Jeffery.



Phase 1: Anxiety, confusion and self-doubt.

It takes an average of seeing 6 doctors over a period of 4 years for most people to get a diagnosis of having autoimmune disease. For some, it is even longer.

During that time, you are experiencing a wide variety of distressing symptoms like exhaustion, insomnia, anxiety, weight gain, physical pain and not having the energy or focus to get through your normal day.

You know that something is wrong, you know that this is not “normal” for you, yet your concerns are not taken seriously by your Doctor. You begin to experience medical gaslighting, the erosion and denial of your own lived experience and the minimisation or trivialisation of your symptoms and concerns. This can be an ongoing experience over many years that further wears you down.

Rather than test, doctors look at your current life stage, age or situation and then tell you that you are exhausted because you are a new Mother or you are feeling pain as the natural process of ageing or you are offered anti-anxiety or anti-depressant medication or referred to a psychologist for counselling.

As symptoms continue or worsen, your Doctor may send you for testing which you are told, “is within normal range”. This translates into “nothing is wrong with you”.

Some people are also told that the symptoms are “in their head” or are labeled as hypochondriacs. Some doctors refer to patients in the phase of actively seeking diagnosis as “frequent flyers”, because of the amount of visits or different doctors they are seeing.

Because there is no validation of your experience that something is wrong with you, you begin the process of self-blame, explaining your experience as something lacking within you so you can begin to label yourself as lazy, unmotivated or undisciplined or believe that you are suffering from depression or mental illness.

As your symptoms continue to worsen, you go from Doctor to Doctor, feeling increasingly anxious, frustrated, confused, angry and powerless, that your symptoms and experiences are not being taken seriously or believed. This phase continues until you finally receive a diagnosis.

Phase 2: Relief and shock.

Prior to chronic illness, your only experience of sickness was having something that could be fixed by medication, surgery or rest that you eventually completely recovered from.

Finally getting a diagnosis of chronic illness, depending on what you have and how it has been explained to you, can first give you a feeling of immense relief because now you have an answer.



There is actually something wrong with you that has been causing you to feel this way and you have confirmation and validation that it was not “all in your head.”

The relief of having a diagnosis comes with the expectation and hope that it can be fixed and that you will soon be feeling back to normal or that it will give you a starting point that will help you determine exactly how to deal with the illness and recover.

What you are told about the diagnosis, the progression of the disease, potential treatment options and expected outcomes, will largely determine if you fully experience phase 2 or if it is delayed.

You may immediately be faced with ongoing medication and monitoring of various bodily functions including things like: daily thyroid replacement hormone; regular blood testing; insulin injections and blood sugar monitoring; further, more invasive testing; surgery; drugs; immunosuppressants, steroids and referral to specialists in particular areas of medicine.

This can include potential side effects or reactions to medication or pain relief, possible outcomes of disease progression including limited movement or function, loss of muscle strength or becoming increasingly disabled or requiring further testing for other associated diseases.

You may be offered surgery for the affected body organs such as removal of damaged parts of your large or small intestine, partial or full removal of your thyroid or medical destruction of your thyroid gland by radioactive iodine or interventions.

Depending on the illness you are diagnosed with, you may be given little to no information about the condition you are now living with apart from being given a prescription or drug information documents.

You may be told that there is no treatment or limited treatment options and that you will have to learn to adapt to your “new normal” with no information given as to what that may be or how you will manage your life and continue to work and function.

The amount of relief or shock you experience will be determined by many factors including: how and what you are told, what information you are given about the illness and disease progression, your own personality and your doctors attitude and approach.

Chronic illness that has no treatment or is seen to be “easily treated” like thyroid disease, are more likely to be minimised or trivialised as something the patient just has to learn to live with. The one piece of information that is almost always conveyed to you is that the disease is chronic and incurable and the focus is alleviation of pain and symptoms.

Until a disease is actually diagnosed, it does not seem to be real, so it is easy to live with the hope that one day it will just go away as mysteriously as it seemed to arrive and you will be back to normal.



Being told that you now have an incurable, life long illness that may or may not get worse is a clear, emotional demarcation that your life has just irrevocably changed and that the life you knew before is gone.

Shock is a form of emotional trauma. When you are in emotional shock, you cannot seem to think straight. Your formally safe and predictable life has been shaken to the core by an event that you were totally unprepared for and did not foresee happening to you.

You feel anxious and fuzzy headed. You can experience disassociation, where everything feels unreal or that you are detached or disconnected from yourself and others. The big rush of adrenaline from emotional shock makes your heart race and your stomach clench and leaves you feeling weak and shaky.

Emotional shock can induce vomiting, nausea, feeling faint or like you are going to pass out or be expressed with uncontrollable or hysterical sobbing. Some people in shock experience the feeling of stepping completely outside of themselves so that they are observing themselves reacting but unable to do anything to change or control it.

Your thoughts can feel “all over the place” or you can even feel like a different person entirely as shock can create a temporary change of personality. Formally social people can become withdrawn and want to be left alone and become isolated from friends and family. More introverted people can suddenly feel the need to be around others, wanting to go out every night or do things with others in order to distract themselves from what they are feeling.

Emotional shock can also trigger off past traumatic events, adding to the feeling of fear and anxiety that your world is no longer a safe, predictable place and that things will never be the same again. It is also possible to experience delayed shock so that you feel calm at the time, but days or even weeks later, the shock hits you and you feel like you are suddenly falling apart.

If your diagnosis was one that was trivialised, the level of shock you are experiencing can feel out of all proportion to what is happening. It can feel like you are making “a big deal over nothing” and that you are being overly dramatic or hysterical, which makes it feel even worse because you don't feel validated or supported.

Even though you feel that you have just been given a life sentence that you will have to try to deal with, those close to you may not understand either the seriousness of the disease and minimise it or go through their own feelings of shock and denial and are not emotionally available to you.

Everyone experiences emotional shock differently and how long it takes to pass depends on the individual. If the effects of shock last for more than six months, professional help in the form of counselling is advised.



Phase 3: Fear and Denial.

Chronic illness brings with it so many unknowns. Medication may be ineffective, difficult to adjust or find the right dose for you or bring with it new and frightening symptoms from side effects or there may be little to no treatment options available for the illness you have.

When the initial relief and shock from diagnosis begins to fade, you are left facing a new life, filled with uncertainty, with no clear path or direction to follow apart from trying to get on with your life as best you can. What this basically means is that everything counts on you.

The ongoing nature of chronic illness makes it very difficult to explain to your partner, family, friends and colleagues the very real challenges and changes you are dealing with on a daily basis, particularly if your illness is an invisible one where you look “healthy” and the same as you did before.

Fear is exhausting, stressful and unsustainable because in the meantime, life still goes on. There are children to care for, work to be done, responsibilities that you have to manage and deal with on a daily basis and none of that is going away just because you now have chronic illness.

There is a lot of information about diseases and symptoms on the internet and much of it is overwhelming and frightening. Disease support groups can offer a wealth of patient experience and knowledge but also, give you a frightening glimpse into a possible future as you read others experiences of disability, pain and hopelessness.

Not only are you dealing with pain, fluctuating energy levels and continuing symptoms, any possible lifestyle changes to help you improve your quality of life or decrease your symptoms has to be all managed and driven by you, which just adds to the feeling of overwhelm.

Dealing with and managing your illness, finding doctors who understand and doing the research to help you know what you are dealing with can feel like a full time job. Denial makes everything seem easier to manage and deal with because denial is meant to be a short term method of emotional protection when things become too much.

Anything that makes you feel vulnerable or takes away your ability to feel in control of your life can trigger denial and because many chronic illnesses progress and worsen slowly, giving you time to adapt and accept any restrictions or changes that they bring, it is easier to push through them with denial and ignore what is happening.

The biggest issue with denial is that the cumulative effect of pushing through and ignoring the symptoms of chronic illness, can create and trigger autoimmune flares where your conditions can worsen. Denial can lead to being hospitalised with a health crisis, unable to function at all.



Denial of chronic illness can make you feel that you can ignore it and push it away in the short term, but in the long term it leads to worsening health, increasing symptoms and decreasing energy and physical resources.

Developing chronic illness will also highlight any of the pre-existing issues in your life, especially in your relationships. Problems that before could be ignored can become much more difficult as you become less able to function or continue to carry the physical or emotional load that you did before. This makes it even easier to fall deeper into denial, pushing even harder to get things done and keep things the way that they were.

The financial costs of testing, treatment, hospital stays and specialist care adds additional pressure to your relationships and raises stress levels even further. Fear of the future, worsening health and uncertainty of what is going to happen to you, your relationships and your finances can keep you stuck in denial.

Chronic illness can send many families to the brink of financial ruin and many relationships can break under the strain of the ongoing costs and debt from the huge medical bills, particularly if you are no longer able to work full time to help support your family.

Being stuck in fear and denial, stops you from acknowledging and accepting the illness, and prevents you from making any of the personal and lifestyle changes necessary to help you heal and maximise the best levels of energy, health and happiness available to you now.

Fear and denial is the most common phase where people with chronic illness get stuck, sometimes for months or even years.

Phase 4: Anger, Blame and Guilt.

When something bad happens to us, when tragedy strikes, it is human nature to want to find a reason and something or someone to blame for it.

When it comes to chronic illness, the difficulty is that the reasons for why certain types of illness develop are still unknown, with many potential contributing factors including genetics, environment, diet, chemical or toxin exposure, past trauma or being triggered by infection or virus.

Doctors who fail to listen to symptoms, not order more in-depth tests or not interpret the tests correctly, further contribute to the problem as the disease continues to worsen and the symptoms become more debilitating.

Having no real answers, support or understanding from the medical profession who you previously relied on to help make you well, can feel like a betrayal as you are left to struggle alone.



Living with the knowledge that you have a life long, incurable condition with no real idea how much recovery will be possible for you and what your future will bring, can have you questioning your faith, your own ability, your purpose and your life.

You can feel angry at your partner, children, friends and family for not understanding what you are going through or feel that they are blaming you for being unreliable, lazy or using your illness as an excuse or feel disappointed or betrayed that they are not stepping up and helping you manage. When there is no external reason found for what is happening to you, the anger often turns inward to self-blame and the obvious target for the blame is your body.

Your body is seen as the enemy and the betrayer. The thing that is ruining your life and your happiness. That is refusing to get well or give you energy or that is causing you pain. Your body lets you down constantly, making it difficult to be who you were before, the person who used to have energy and drive and motivation. The person who could get through the day without needing to take a nap. The person who could be an active parent, partner, friend and employee.

Your body and it's inability to cooperate is stopping you from working and earning an income, being the kind of parent that you want to be or harming your relationship with your partner. Constantly feeling tired, brain fogged, in pain and unable to function properly, leads to more frustration, anger and disappointment and it feels like your body is to blame for it all. In many cases, weight gain or loss, skin changes, hair loss, disability or other physical changes can make you look like a completely different person than you were before which can make you resent your body even more and start to feel guilty about how much you have changed.

Guilt makes you feel that your illness and any disability or limitations you are experiencing are hurting and letting down the people you love. You can begin to feel like a burden to your partner, family or friends to the point where you may feel like you need to offer them an "out" from the relationship or worry that they are standing by you from pity or loyalty, rather than love.

Guilt makes you believe that you are harming your children by having them see a parent who is constantly sick and unable to play or be with them the way that you used to be. Guilt makes you worry that you are being judged by your inability to work as hard as you could or complete your share of housework or exercise like you used to before.

Guilt stops you from setting boundaries with difficult or toxic people, stops you from saying no to requests that drain your time and energy and stops you from asking for help in case you are seen as being weak or not good enough. Guilt makes you feel that you are not doing enough, that you are making a big deal out of nothing, that other people can get on with their lives with chronic illness except for you. The guilt fuels the anger and the anger feeds the guilt in an ongoing cycle that further adds to the stress and inflammation experienced in your body.

All of the guilt and anger creates the feelings of helplessness and injustice at what your life has become, at what can often feel like a complete loss of identity and independence which then turns into grief. Getting stuck in anger, blame and guilt can lead to bitterness and steal all of the potential joy and satisfaction away from your life.



Phase 5 : Grief.

Being diagnosed with chronic illness is a life changing event that does not receive the recognition and support that it deserves from the medical community, family, friends or society. This makes the grief of chronic illness even harder to reconcile because there is no recognition or validation from anyone around you about what you are feeling and trying to deal with, often alone.

The grief at being diagnosed with chronic illness is extensive and overwhelming. You grieve the person that you used to be, the one who used to get sick occasionally but would always recover and get back to normal. The one who used to wake up in the morning and get things done. It is a complete loss of identity and of the person who you were before the chronic illness took over your life and body.

You grieve for your old life and the energy, health and abilities that you had back then. Being able to socialise and enjoy time with friends, being able to stay out all night and not be shattered for weeks. Not waking up in pain, exhausted, wondering how you are going to get through the day.

You grieve for the person that you used to see in the mirror and for the life and identity that chronic illness has taken away from you and more than anything, you just want your old life back.

Chronic illness can mean the loss of your career that you may have spent years training and working towards and your means of financially supporting yourself and your family. Chronic illness can take away activities that were a big part of your life and your social network that you may never regain.

Chronic illness can take you from thriving and enjoying your life and looking forward to the future to barely surviving and struggling to find the energy and motivation to get through the day.

Chronic illness can feel like a life sentence that is as isolating and confining as any prison, feeling trapped in a body that is inflamed, weak, unreliable and unfamiliar and no one around you seems to understand what you are going through and what you have lost.

Your thoughts become full of “what if’s”. What if I get worse? What if my partner leaves me? What if I can’t work any more? What if this damages my children and they end up hating me? What if I never get better? This only adds to the grief and the feeling that you have lost your old identity and the certainty of your life that went with it.

Many avenues of comfort and community can feel lost to you. Not having enough energy to go to your church to worship. Not being able to spend time out with friends and family. Not being able to play with your children or travel any further than a short distance away.

Dietary changes mean that things like dining out, barbecues, parties or catered events can become extremely difficult to negotiate.



Because so much of our social and emotional lives revolve around food and eating together, you grieve the loss of just being able to eat anywhere with friends and family like you did before. You grieve the loss of comfort foods and traditional family meals that you may never be able to eat again.

The most difficult part of the grief is that there are very few people who understand or offer support. Many people with chronic illness just don't talk about how they feel because they don't feel believed and they don't feel that people are genuinely interested in listening to them.

All of the significant relationships in your life can be changed in ways that you did not expect or anticipate because others are not willing or able to understand just how much things have changed for you.

You can get to see a very different side of friends and family in ways that can be hurtful and disappointing and not all of your relationships may survive the transition, which only adds to the feelings of loss.

Chronic illness challenges you to forge a new identity and in many cases, a very new and different life but before that can happen, the old one must be fully grieved and acknowledged before you are ready to move on.

Phase 6: Depression and Isolation.

Chronic illness can be like entering a brand new country alone without a map, unable to speak the language and being left to find your way all on your own. In many cases, you can feel like you know more about the disease than the doctor or specialist you are seeing.

For chronic illness, at best they can use surgery, drugs to try to suppress the immune system or provide pain killers, many of which can have severe side effects. One of the turning points in the emotional adjustment to chronic illness comes when you reach the limitations of what the medical system can offer you.

While there are many different things that can be done to improve your quality of life, alleviate symptoms and better manage your energy, like commencing a healing diet, setting strong boundaries, changing jobs or cutting down work hours, re-negotiating roles and tasks at home and managing stress, all of them can feel totally unreachable because all of them depend on you to do them. This is a huge additional emotional load to put on someone who is already struggling.

Changing the foods you eat to help your health often meets resistance from partners or children who do not want to be deprived of foods that they enjoy. Because you can have invisible illness, employers may not believe that you need reduced hours to manage your energy.



Feeling exhausted, brain fogged and in pain can make changing your whole lifestyle feel too hard and unachievable, especially when you are struggling to have enough energy, motivation or resources just to get through the day.

Chronic autoimmune disease and the brain fog that goes with it depresses and suppresses the emotions and raises anxiety, making everything feel like an enormous challenge. Thinking, speaking and remembering things can take a huge amount of energy and effort. Brain fog and forgetting even simple words or tasks leads to mistakes and constantly second guessing yourself.

Just getting out of bed and making it through the day can often take all of the energy you have and it becomes easy to slip into depression and isolation. Chronic pain is debilitating and wears you down, emotionally and physically.

Lack of energy means that time to socialise is not a priority and even if you do have the energy, when the moment comes to go out, the energy may have disappeared or you are now in so much pain that you need to cancel. After repeated cancellations, friends can wrongly assume that you are not interested in getting together or that you are unreliable.

At the time when you most need support, you do not have the energy to seek it. Online support groups can become your only outlet which given the serious issues that many people are facing, can also add to the depression that you are experiencing. Depression can make the symptoms of chronic illness even worse and can cause you to withdraw even more, especially when paired with guilt and feeling that you are a burden to others.

Depression is often masked or mistaken as symptoms of the chronic illness. It is important that you do not ignore the symptoms of depression, especially if the depression is becoming so bad that you are feeling suicidal or using self-harming behaviours.

Symptoms of depression include: Becoming withdrawn from family and friends, crying for no reason, loss of interest and pleasure in normal activities, feeling of worthlessness and hopelessness, sleeping too much or too little or suicidal thoughts. If you feel that you may be experiencing depression, it is important that you reach out to others. Consult your Doctor or Nurse practitioner and discuss it with them. Most States, Counties and Territories have free telephone counselling services that you can use like Lifeline in Australia.

Phase 7: Surrender, Hope and Acceptance.

The journey to acceptance can be a difficult one to reach. Being able to accept the changes that chronic illness has brought to your life takes time and the time it takes differs for each individual, depending on their own unique circumstances.

When it comes to the word “acceptance”, many people wrongly confuse it with “giving up” and “giving in” to the disease.



They wrongly believe that acceptance means that you stop fighting or stop trying to help or improve your life and condition in any way and sink down into a bottomless pit of depression, despair and become a burden to everyone around you.

Acceptance is the opposite of giving up.

When you can finally accept the situation and disease that you are living with, without denying it, ignoring it or being angry with it, you can begin to look at what practical options are available to you, to help you create the best possible health, happiness and life that you can right now.

Acceptance means that you face the reality of the disease you have, catalogue the symptoms you experience and start looking at ways that you can help yourself and your body deal with what you are both facing together.

Acceptance is saying: "This is what I have. What can I do to help myself that is within my control?"

Acceptance does not mean you ignore how much your life has changed or what you have lost. Chronic illness comes with many different levels and layers of grief that you will continue to experience as different situations or limitations occur.

Above all, acceptance is realistic. It helps pave the way for hope that there *are* things that you can do that are within your control, to help your body heal, reduce your symptoms or even reach remission.

Acceptance of yourself as someone living with chronic illness helps you to stop feeling victimised and powerless so that the illness becomes part of your experience but does not define who you are.

Feeling inspired by reading other peoples stories of reduction or elimination of symptoms can give you much needed hope that your life can still be good, especially if these positive stories are coming from people living with the same disease as you and who are still leading active, meaningful lives. Acceptance helps you realise that the chronic illness has been years, maybe even decades in the making and gives you hope that you can identify potential triggers and reverse some or even, the majority of the damage that has been done.

Acceptance is an ongoing process when living with chronic illness because it can be unpredictable. Energy, mood and pain levels can fluctuate from day to day, even moment to moment. Autoimmune flares can be triggered by external things over which you have no control like getting a viral infection, cold or flu, external stress or emotional upset, not getting enough sleep or pushing your body too hard.

Experiencing health set backs and flares when you are incapacitated, in pain and unable to care for yourself or get things done gives you two choices: fight it which often makes things worse or surrender to it.



Surrender in the case of chronic illness is the art of radical acceptance and self-care. To surrender in those moments means that you are acknowledging what is happening and trying to make yourself as comfortable with it as possible so that you are not adding additional stress or emotional and physical pain to what is already a difficult situation.

For example, if you are experiencing an autoimmune flare and need to be in bed, surrender means accepting what is and trying to nurture yourself and be patient with yourself, until you recover.

Or you can make it emotionally and physically harder by resenting being bed bound, try to push yourself through it, and sink back down into anger, denial, depression and fear.

In every situation, you have the choice of how you choose to see yourself. You can choose to see yourself as powerless or as someone trying to make the best of a difficult and challenging situation.

Finding surrender, hope and acceptance in your life with chronic illness can reduce a lot of the stress and emotional pain that you are experiencing, including having a soothing effect on inflammation levels. Researchers have found that chronic psychological stress effects the bodies ability to regulate inflammation that can lead to disease progression and development.

Many people who live with chronic illness have reported that stress is a personal trigger for autoimmune flares or worsening of their conditions because of the impact it has on adrenals, gut and getting good quality sleep. This makes surrender, hope and acceptance even more vital for your health and quality of life.

Phase 8: Action, Change and Experimentation.

Acceptance sets the scene for action, change and experimentation. As human beings, we are remarkably adaptable creatures who can improvise, invent solutions to problems and try to get the most out of any situation or environment we find ourselves in.

You begin to find new rhythms and form new habits and routines for your daily life, including taking medication, fitting in medical appointments and adapting to what your body and mind are capable of.

This includes assessing what lifestyle interventions can help you like creating a new sleep routine, reducing work hours or taking a less stressful or demanding job, changing the foods you eat to reduce inflammation and pain levels and continuing to dig for co-factors like infections, gut issues, vitamin or mineral deficiencies or other underlying things that can contribute to how you feel and function.



Action can also include changing your relationships, setting new boundaries with the people in your life and negotiating the physical and emotional load at home. This can include having honest conversations with your loved ones about the nature of the chronic illness and how it affects you. This is especially important with your partner and children if you have them. Much chronic illness is invisible and because you look the same, people expect you to be the same unless you tell them otherwise.

You can put 10 people with the same chronic illness together and they will all experience the illness in different ways, depending on their own unique physiology, how their organs are affected, how much damage was done to the body before medical or dietary interventions began and many other individual factors.

When taking action to manage or even reverse chronic illness, it is very much the case of experimenting to see what works for you. There is no one particular method or protocol that works exactly the same for every person, though there are common, contributing factors, particularly when it comes to food. For example, what I can eat without triggering an autoimmune response in my body, can be very different from what others can safely consume.

You may need to trial several different types of medication in conjunction with lifestyle interventions, in order to find the best possible quality of life that is available for you at this time. It takes consistency, experimentation and trial and error to see how your body reacts and how different medications work in your system.

Change is challenging because when we are talking about change, it actually means changing habitual patterns of behaviour. Habitual patterns of behaviour create neural pathways in the brain so that we perform the behaviours automatically to the point where it can feel very uncomfortable when we are not following those habits.

Habits create routines, structure and predictability in our lives, all of which contribute to feelings of safety and security and the saying “old habits die hard” has a grounding in truth. Rather than the 30 days that used to be believed, creating a new habit takes 90 to 100 days but once created, it becomes something that you “just do” as a regular part of your day and is “hard wired” into your normal routine.

In the action phase, your focus is very much about finding out what changes you can make that are within your control to improve your health. Being willing to experiment, analyse your results and create new, self-supporting habits of self-care will help you create the best possible health, happiness and life that is available to you now with chronic illness.



Phase 9: Resilience, gratitude and appreciation.

Although there is no “short term fix” for chronic illness, no magical cure and no one size that fits all, it is still possible to have a happy, meaningful and rewarding life, even though it may be different from the one you thought you would live.

Because of the progressive nature of chronic illness, you may find yourself needing new ways to manage yourself and your life, which makes the stage of resilience, gratitude and appreciation so important.

Chronic illness can test you in ways that you never could have believed and change you in ways that you never could have imagined and many times, that change can be for the better.

In any difficult situation, there are opportunities to grow and evolve or shut down and sink deeper into darkness. Through the testing times, your relationships with those you love can grow stronger and more connected. You can find new friends, community, careers or purpose in your life. You can also develop a new found appreciation for your own strength, abilities and determination.

You can create a more loving, supportive and compassionate relationship for yourself and your body and become more focussed on enjoying what you can do, instead of what you cannot.

Many people with chronic illness even come to see their experience as a gift. One that has taught them so much about themselves, their relationship with others, their connection to the God of their understanding and given them opportunities that they would not have otherwise had.

The ability to develop and strengthen your resilience in life with chronic illness is essential. Resilience is the ability to adapt well in the face of the difficulties of life. Being able to “bounce back” from the stressful or even traumatic events you are given, as constructively and positively as possible.

Developing the capacity for resilience means that while you may still be knocked down by adversity, loss or problems, with time you will recover and learn from the experiences without being defeated by them.

Things that contribute towards building resilience include having positive beliefs about your abilities and being able to embrace change. It is important to nurture yourself and develop supportive social networks, especially with other like minded people who understand what it is like to live with chronic illness.

Setting goals for your health, life and happiness, developing problem solving skills and working on what you can achieve with a sense of optimism, all help develop your resilience and emotional strength. When coupled with appreciation and gratitude, this gives you very valuable and powerful tools to begin to create meaning in your new life with chronic illness.



Appreciation is the first part of cultivating gratitude. When we appreciate something or someone, we recognise that it is something that is valuable or meaningful to us. Being grateful and feeling gratitude connects us back to all of the things in life that are good, loving, amazing, astonishing and all of the benefits we get from being present and open to them.

Gratitude involves using all of our senses, slowing down, appreciating the goodness, love and wonder that is available to us in any given moment. Gratitude reminds us that the world is still a wonderful place and that kindness love and beauty exists, there for us to appreciate and enjoy.

Gratitude and appreciation when chosen and practised, helps create a meaningful life and gratitude is a choice that you can make in each moment. To stop, look, listen and feel what is available to you right now. Combined with resilience, it helps strengthen you through any challenging times that you may face so that you can grieve, accept and grow through the experience.

Key points about the Chronic Illness Grief Model.

It is important to note that progress through the chronic illness grief model is not linear and not everyone experiences every single phase of the model in the same way. Reaching phase 9 is not the “goal” of the model, because where you are in the model can change throughout your life, depending on your own personal situation. It is however, a very good place to reach and something that will give you a tremendous amount of peace.

Some people skip certain phases entirely, others get stuck in certain phases and feel unable to move forwards and some cycle between phases in an emotional loop that feels difficult to break.

From my clinical experience, the phases where most people get stuck in the model are phase 3: Fear and Denial, phase 4: Anger, Blame and Guilt and phase 6: Depression and isolation.

Phase 5: Grief, is the phase that creates the most resistance and anxiety because of the potentially devastating loss that it represents.

Acknowledging and experiencing the grief of phase 5 makes many people fear that they will “give in” to the disease and that it will then become “real” and inescapable or that the experience of the grief will be completely overwhelming.

By having a clearly defined model for the grief of chronic illness, it is my hope that it will help you identify where you are in the process and help you understand the next phases and the potential benefits that they bring.

Getting a new diagnosis or experiencing a health set back can trigger the process all over again so knowing where you are in the grief model gives you more understanding of how to help yourself move through it and create more resilience to help you bounce back when you get knocked down.



Chronic Illness Grief Model Summary:

- Phase 1: Anxiety, Confusion and Self-Doubt.
- Phase 2: Relief and Shock.
- Phase 3: Fear and Denial.
- Phase 4: Anger, Blame and Guilt.
- Phase 5: Grief.
- Phase 6: Depression and Isolation.
- Phase 7: Surrender, Hope and Acceptance.
- Phase 8: Action, Change and Experimentation.
- Phase 9: Resilience, Gratitude and Appreciation.





From my own personal experience of having my life profoundly changed by chronic illness, I understand exactly how it feels.

The trauma, the helplessness and the complete overwhelm when no one seems to be able to help you or offer you any support that will actually make a difference to your life.

The loneliness. The feeling that no one really “gets” what you are going through.

The exhaustion and pain that makes getting out of bed feel like an almost impossible task.

Trying to deal with all of the grief and the fear and the uncertainty and still having to get on with your life because all of those responsibilities are not going to go away, just because you have chronic illness.

The feeling that you have lost yourself and everything that made you who you are.

Traditional therapy is not set up to deal with the key emotional issues of chronic illness.

Talking about it won't make it better or overcome the trauma. Chronic illness changes your whole life which means that you need a new emotional framework, elimination of your trauma and guilt and practical strategies and mind shift skills to start taking control of your life, health and happiness.

My proven therapy programs are unlike any sort of therapy that you have experienced before and they get real, lasting results that will give you the help, direction and support you need.

I offer a **FREE 25 minute Discovery Session** online anywhere in the world where our time zones are compatible, to meet me and talk about what your biggest struggles are and see if I feel like the right therapist to give you the solutions you need to find yourself again. No catch, no obligation, I will tell you honestly if I believe I can help you or not, let you know which of my programs will give you the best results and what the investment is in Australian dollars and invite you to take a week to think it through.

After the Discovery Session, I will email you all the details and you decide if working with me sounds like the next best step for you.

Want to know more about how my therapy programs work?

Book your free Discovery Session with me now.



Qualifications:

(B.A.) Monash University. Psychology and Sociology Major.

Diploma of Clinical Hypnotherapy.

Certificate IV in Clinical Hypnotherapy.

Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Certificated Rewind Technique hypnosis therapist.

Certificated Ego State Therapist.

Certified Beautiful You Life Coach.

You can find out more about Kerry Jeffery at her website: www.emotionalautoimmunity.com

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