A day in the life of living with depression

Mental illness is a difficult thing to describe. No one word, sentence or even paragraph does it justice. That's because mental illness fundamentally changes the way a person thinks, feels and even acts. It's not an illness that changes one thing about you; living with a mental illness can change many moments of your everyday life.



I awake to find myself exhausted, again. It's the depression combined with a hangover from the medications I must take at night.

I drag my body, aching for another two hours of sleep, out of bed and into the bathroom. I look into the mirror and see what I feared – the ugliest girl in the world. She is fat with a puffy face and dark circles under her eyes. Her neck is too short and her arms are too long for her body. An image not even a mother could love.

But then I remember. That's the depression talking. It wants me to think I'm the ugliest, dumbest, worst person on the planet. I work to fight the thoughts that rattle around in my head.

Depression, and other mental illnesses, changes the way you think about yourself and the way you see the world around you. Mental illnesses give you irrational or false thoughts, and even though you might know this, that doesn't stop them from coming.

I'm driving on my way to work trying to ignore the nausea building in my stomach from the morning medications combined with the small amount of breakfast I managed to choke down. I see an ambulance racing along a street to my right with sirens blazing. My eyes moisten as I think how unfair it is that a person should need an ambulance this early in the morning. My mind flashes back 20 years to my sister who might have heard her own ambulance moments before she died, after being hit by a car. I try to fight back the tears so I won't arrive to work all red and blotchy.

Depression tends to force a focus on the negative and amplify sad emotions. It makes everyday things paralyzing and oppressive, and smothers the sufferer's emotional state.

I sit at my desk at work and stare at the screen of emails that have been received since I went home last night. Every word seems to take a minute to make sense. Everyone here works so fast. They type so fast. They use so many acronyms and short forms of words. I'm forced to try and translate their senseless letters into meaningful sentences. The emails look like Alphaghetti to me; letters swimming in a bowl instead of making sense on a monitor.

Mental illness can slow the world down and make it seem like it no longer makes sense. Everyday actions take on the weight of the world and each thought can seem to take a Herculean effort to create.

I've been lying on my couch for the two hours since I got home from work. I had two meetings and a conference call today; acting "happy" and "normal" all that time has exhausted me to the point where the idea of getting up to warm a TV dinner is laughable. I know I should eat and I know it's important for me to maintain a good diet to fight my depression but the muscles in my body just won't do their job in walking me to the kitchen.

The effort it takes to blend in with others in the everyday world can be overwhelming. People with mental illness often appear "normal" to others but then barely function when on their own.

At last it's time for bed and I'm back in front of the mirror again. I seem to look worse and more haggard than this morning. I look to the right and see my pill bottles all lined up in a neat, little row. It's time to do it all over again.

Even when taking medication as prescribed, people can still suffer from the symptoms of mental illness. While not every day will look this dark, a person with depression has to get past a day like this to see others that will be more hopeful. If you suffer from depression, try to acknowledge your bad days and focus on the good days that will come - there is a light at the end of the tunnel.