

How to cope with boredom when you have extreme fatigue

The topic of how to cope with boredom is one that comes up a lot in the sessions I hold with the people I'm helping. Doing the right thing when you have extreme fatigue often means doing very little for much of the time - physically, and cognitively. And it can be difficult to find a way to deal with this and stop your mindset sliding into a less positive place. So here are seven tips that I hope will help you to keep those boredom pangs at bay.

Tip 1 - open your mind

The most important place to start, is to get into the right mindset. Boredom is an emotion that we experience, but it's rooted in the practical too of course. If we feel we can't *do* much, we start to look at our lives from a place of 'lack' which is when boredom (and other negative emotions) start to creep in.

So rather than focussing on all of the things you can't do that you used to love filling your time with, become open to the possibility that there are new things you can discover that could (and will!) make life feel a bit more interesting again. Consciously make a decision along the lines of: "I am open to finding new ways to create interest and enjoyment in my days" (say the words out loud if it feels right, your brain will really pay attention then!).

Tip 2 - don't look at it as doing nothing

Still on the topic of getting into the right mindset... Resting and taking it easy can sometimes be viewed as 'doing nothing', but this couldn't be further from the truth! Whether it's because you're proactively resting as part of your careful Pacing approach or having to rest because your symptoms are telling you you've overdone it, look at it as a positive action you're taking. Far from doing nothing, you are doing the best thing you could probably be doing at that time!

Tip 3 - match your internal perception and external environment

Many people find it difficult to rest. Please don't think you're unusual if this is the case for you - pretty much everybody finds it difficult at first. Particularly those who have previously been used to living life at 100 miles an hour, always rushing around. Calming your nervous system by doing things like meditation

and yoga nidra can be hugely beneficial for those tackling extreme fatigue, but many find it so difficult to get used to slowing down enough to be able to relax into them. And finding it difficult to enjoy slowing down can also become frustrating and trigger boredom.

So, I want to talk a little bit about internal representation - this is about changing how we match our view of our *external* environment with our *internal* perception. If that sounds a bit confusing, let me give you a quick explanation...

Imagine you have your own personal metronome, which is ticking along at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you have to spend time in places, or with people, who are at a completely different speed than your personal metronome it can feel uncomfortable. I wonder if you can recall a time where you were waiting in a shop queue that was moving very slowly, due to the people ahead of you seeming to take their time over things. I bet you can remember feeling a little bit frustrated by it! This is because that external environment was moving much slower than your own internal metronome. You might not have needed to get anywhere in a hurry after that shop visit, but your internal speed wanted to get things done quickly! Likewise, if you spend time with people who are much faster than you, this can start to make you feel a bit overwhelmed and bothered. That's because they're trying to get your metronome to tick faster than it feels happier doing!

So, my tip is to slow down your external environment if you're finding it difficult to rest and find peace with a slower pace of life. Listen to some slow classical music, play your audio book at the 0.8 speed setting (or slower, play around and see what works and is still pleasurable to listen to). Try talking a little more slowly when you're resting and asking anyone around you to do the same. Certainly, don't watch action films or listen to fast-beat music - choose slower options. And once your metronome starts to slow down a little, you might well find that it becomes easier to embrace resting and meditation.

Tip 4 - embrace being calm and gentle with yourself

Following on nicely from the tip above, another way to find it easier to relax and do less is to really embrace it and almost make it an indulgence. Wear your cosiest, most comfortable clothes or PJ's, light candles or have essential oils burning, buy yourself a cosy throw or blanket in a colour you love, for those sofa-rest days.

Tip 5 - get themey!

We hear a lot about the benefits of creating a bit of structure and routine in our days in order to make them flow a little faster. Which is great advice, as it's

very true. But I want to take that into a slightly different direction and suggest you think about 'theming' different parts of your days and weeks. Why not make Mondays the days that any available energy is spent learning about something new? Tuesdays could be the days you do something different nutritiously. Wednesdays could be your indulgent days where you do things for yourself most of the day. There are so many different ways you could do this, and it can really help to make the week go by a little faster.

Why not use colours! Pick on a colour for each day of the week and then theme everything you do on that day to its assigned colour: the food you eat, the drinks you consume, book-covers for that day's reading, the title of a film or tv show - even the colour of the mug you drink your (relevant coloured herbal tea) from!

Tip 6 - gamify everyday tasks

Still on the subject of injecting a bit more fun, why not embrace 'gamification'? For those who don't fully understand what that means, in essence it's about making a 'game' out of some of the things you do each day. Let me give you an example to kick off some ideas:

When planning meals for the week, write down your evening meal choices and pop them all into a hat/jar. Every morning, pick a slip of paper at random to choose what you'll be eating that particular evening. This might seem a little simple and silly, but introducing this sort of randomness into your week can add a little bit of excitement and surprise, and it also stops you feeling you're stuck into many routines. It keeps our brains nice and energised too! And if you've got young kids at home with you involve them in this, they love this type of approach!

Tip 7 - focus on something that you can improve faster

Depending on your specific condition, improving your extreme fatigue symptoms can take a considerable time. Looking ahead towards an uncertain timeframe can be one of the most difficult things to accept. So, my final tip is to think about focusing on something that you can enhance in a shorter timescale - or at least achieve considerable improvements.

When I was tackling my own ME/CFS recovery, I decided to focus on improving my skin. I was in my early 40's and had never had the glowing blemish-free skin that I'd have loved. So, I decided to focus on seeing what I could achieve with all of the time I now had on my hands. I researched different products and cleansing routines and had the energy most days to do something beneficial, like a face pack or facial massage - as long as I timed it carefully. I'm pleased

to report that over a decade later my skin is one of my best features! I often get compliments on it, and the habits and routines I got into during those difficult months have held me in very good stead now I've reached the big "five-oh"!

Other things you might want to consider: make plans to improve your garden - even if you have to delegate doing the work to someone else; get your nails looking fabulous; grow your hair into a new style or (for men) how about seeing how you look with a beard?! There are lots of things you can do - they might not have been things you'd have even contemplated giving time and attention to before, and might seem quite trivial, but priorities change in many ways when you're tackling your fatigue rescue. And if it relieves the boredom, isn't that the most important thing for now?

I hope these tips have given you at least one or two things to think about doing differently.

Take care!