

# Dancing with Monsters

CHRONIC ILLNESS as CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

[www.dancingwithmonsters.com](http://www.dancingwithmonsters.com)



## When Your Body Disappoints...

Our bodies need what they need. They can do what they can do. In some cases, if we go to the edge of our capability and stretch a *little...bit...further*, we can expand our possibilities. And sometimes we can't. Especially when we live with chronic illness, we need to be cautious about pushing beyond our limits. Sometimes we can't do today what we did yesterday. Sometimes we find out today what we shouldn't have done yesterday. Our bodies disappoint us.

I've been playing with the idea of buoyancy. When I was a kid, I loved taking inflatable toys into the water. No matter how many times I pushed them down or even sometimes sat on them, they popped back up and floated serenely. That is what I want for my emotional self as I deal with the pushes and pulls of chronic illness.

If you want that too, try this:

### 1. Feel the feelings.

Sweetie, it's hard. Sometimes it helps to say that out loud. Take a deep breath in and notice what your body is feeling. Is your belly tight? Is your head buzzing? Get more specific than "tired" and "achy." Let tears come, if they want to. Shout into a pillow if you need to. Rant and rave about the unfairness of it all. Keep breathing. If you return your attention to deep breaths, the emotions will subside eventually. Even if sometimes it feels like they won't; they will.

### 2. Explore the self-talk behind the feelings.

What's going through your mind before the emotions arise? Are there monster voices telling you how things *should* be or criticizing who and how you are? Sometimes it helps to write things down, so you can get a bit of distance from them. Monsters rarely tell the truth, no matter how loud they shout.

### 3. Release the thoughts and feelings.

The trick is to feel the emotions and acknowledge the thoughts and then leave them behind. You may feel angry at missing the party, but the feeling will pass if you don't hang onto it. Set a timer and indulge your feelings and thoughts for just so long, then do some deep breathing and shift your attention to a small task. Take a walk. Make some tea. Paint a flower.

### 4. Discover the facts.

What's going on with your body? When you strip away what you're feeling and thinking,

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what are the facts? Are your arms weaker? Have your stiffness or pain increased? Why might that be? What is your body telling you? Do you want to talk to a doctor or nurse? I learn over and over that my body's needs are nonnegotiable. If I stay up late one day, I need to take it easy the next.

## **5. Take care of yourself, body and soul.**

Become your own best friend. What would make you feel better? A nap? A massage? Calling a friend? A walk in the park? Some great music? Make a list of ways to nourish yourself and keep it handy for those times when you need TLC but may be too tired to come up with creative ideas.

## **6. Celebrate yourself, body and soul.**

Yes, there are limitations. Invite yourself to find ways to dance within them. Enjoy what your body can do: look at beautiful colors, smell fragrant smells, listen to wonderful music, taste delicious food, touch luxurious textures. Relish the gifts of your soul: read (or watch or listen to) something spiritual, connect with the earth, do something nice for someone else, spend time with a loved one, meditate or pray. Light a birthday candle and celebrate being alive.