

A CASE STUDY

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PATIENT

Profile: Thirty-four year-old accountant
Condition: Multiple complaints including: chronic fatigue, vertigo, eczema, chronic neck pain, digestive disturbances and headaches

Some people have health problems so numerous that ordinary daily activities – going to work, making plans to see friends, getting chores done – become a goal in themselves, often unmet. Illness defines the day; their lives are on hold.

With problems dating back to 1974, this patient was referred to the program by a family member who is a psychotherapist. She entered the 10-week group training program stating upon intake that “no one has ever helped me.” In addition to mainstream medical care, she had pursued other forms of treatment, including acupuncture, homeopathy, herbs, a headache clinic and massage.

“In high school and college, I was always sick,” she said when she started the treatment program. As the years passed, she continued to develop new symptoms, and new diagnoses were offered by a burgeoning list of specialists.

These all resulted in missed days of work, and a constant worried feeling about what she would be able to manage in a day. If she had plans with friends, she says she would always wonder, “How will I feel later?” Her goals for treatment were to eliminate her vertigo, and to reduce her fatigue and headaches. “Anything additional will be a bonus,” she said.

In the last three weeks of the program, instead of a daily tension headache, she had none at all. Her vertigo was gone and the gastrointestinal problems were under control. But the most dramatic improvement was the reduction of her fatigue. She had already exceeded her goals. “My overall energy and outlook on life was much better. My concentration improved and I retained more. I became a lot more tolerant and patient – not getting upset as easily. And people would tell me that I looked great.”

The group work turned out to be yet another bonus. It multiplied the resources available to her by exposing her to strategies used by other patients to overcome obstacles they encountered. Later she was able to draw from those experiences when they became relevant to her. She says simply, “One of the most useful elements for me was hearing real-life situations.”

The most pleasure that she gained from her new found health was the increase in her social activities. Instead of falling into bed each evening at seven, she could keep plans with friends; she began to have fun.

“This program has allowed me to live like a normal person,” she says. “My problems used to control my day; now I can have a day.”