

Can't Stand Ya



I can't stand.

That's the entire sentence—not an abridged version or a double entendre. I really have a difficult time standing in place.

For the most part, I can still walk normally, although I do have some bad days where moving around is difficult.

Even when I'm feeling well enough to walk, my wobbly gait causes me to bump into things (hey, where did that kitchen table come from?), and I'm always tentative around stairs, judging each step carefully.

But, if I'm upright, I want to be moving. But not standing. If I'm standing, I feel like I'm dying. Specifically, the problem is my left leg. Within just a few moments of standing in one place, a burning sensation swells up on my left side, above and below my knee.

Unfortunately, there's a WHOLE lot of standing in this world.

Maybe it's just what we know and are used to. When you see your neighbor, say hello and talk a little about your day, you don't pull up a chair, sit down and talk—you stand.

People love to stand at parties. Whether it's during the holidays, a house-warming or even just a group of friends getting together.

Run into an old friend at the grocery store? You don't clear some space on the store shelf next to the peanut butter to sit and chat.

Most errands (groceries, returning something to a store, shopping, etc.)—they all involve standing in line.

I'm not a fan of having my picture taken because unless taking the picture involves sitting, it's pure agony. I smile through the burn, but I'm no actor, so often you can probably read the pain and anguish on my face.

During my final few years in corporate America, a new trend was popularized: the stand-up meeting!

Because, why not? The theory was the meeting would be shorter, more informal and spur creativity.

Perhaps... but all I remember was grimacing in pain, staring at those comfortable chairs—imagining they had come to life, laughing at us as we stood there—as somebody went through a litany of issues that really didn't even require a meeting in the first place.

I don't think I'm alone in my disdain for standing. There are many negative connotations associated with this word.

Worried you aren't going to make that flight home? It's because you are on **stand**-by.

Unable to get tickets for the game or concert? Sorry, it's **standing** room only.

Still, I often wish I could comfortably stand again. When I'm out, I've caught myself being envious of others that are just standing around doing... well, nothing. I literally marvel at their ability to do so; for me, it's a lost art, a relic of another time. A different universe I used to live in.

Over the years, I've had to learn to adapt to standing.

I have a cane to assist on days that are particularly trying.

Also, I've somewhat perfected what my wife calls "The Flamingo." If I have to stand in place, I slightly raise my left leg up, so that all my pressure and weight is on my right side.

It sounds silly as I type it, but this flamingo-like pose has helped me through some painful moments.

The other alternative is to just avoid the standing altogether. I'm selective with my errands and shopping to minimize any potential standing. Or, if I'm at a public gathering and everyone starts to gather for the stand-around, I just go find a place to sit.

I'm not entirely comfortable being "that guy sitting in the corner by himself," but it's better than being "the guy who is going to be in agony for days because he refused to listen to his body and just sit down."

The most difficult adaptation has been letting others help me with this issue. That's not a flip statement. Living with a disease like MS, I worry about becoming too dependent on others.

So, my pride has to take a backseat when my friends or wife offer to find me a seat, or even give up their own chair. I don't want the night, a party, wedding, reunion or just a random Saturday night to be interrupted by the needs of my MS, but I also know there is virtue in finding deference to my health.

As I sit and type these words, I feel a burn in my left leg. It's a residual reminder of all the standing I've done this holiday season.

But the great times and lasting memories will always be something I can stand for.