

Everyone Else's



Sometimes it can be difficult to live with those pesky MS symptoms that get in the way of the things you actually want to do. It makes it harder that no one else can see or understand the illness too, right?

The thing that makes symptoms even harder to deal with is when a loved one or a friend starts to put their ailments onto you. You know what I'm talking about. When someone tells you they are also exhausted, they also "didn't sleep well" and they also "have terrible back pain." Am I right in saying your first thought is, "well it's not as bad as mine?"

We've all been there, right? Your partner has a cold and makes out like they're dying. Or your friend constantly starts complaining she's been diagnosed with a mouth ulcer and for her, it's the end of the world. It can be so frustrating to deal with.

The thing we often forget, though, is that even though others don't understand what we are personally going through, it's fair to say we don't often take the time to be empathetic towards them either. To us, it may not seem like a big deal because we are constantly being bombarded with new symptoms to deal with, our doctors appointments become second nature, MRI scans are something you just have to do and medication side effects are old hat. To someone that has never been in that position, it can be really scary and frightening for them. We're used to MS to some extent, we understand it changes constantly and expect it to change all the time.

To someone who doesn't live with a chronic illness, this is completely new territory. I have been guilty in the past of almost getting into a competition with another person about whose

symptoms are worse. In retrospect, what did that actually achieve? Did I help that person by sitting and listening to them? No, I told them to stop being so soft and to just get on with it. Do you think that person needed to hear that? Nope. Could I have handled that situation differently? You bet!

I will make a pact with you now that if I'm ever in that situation again, I promise to be more empathetic, listen to the person and try to understand what they are going through from their perspective and not mine.

The people you love in life shouldn't be a competition. We should be supporting them and although it's super hard to do that when they are seemingly complaining about NOTHING, remind yourself what experiences they have with this situation. They're probably used to being healthy—they probably even take it for granted! I know I did before my diagnosis.

So, the next time someone complains to you about them being exhausted or have a sore throat or have pain in their shoulders where their heavy bag has been, remember that this is probably their only experience of pain and exhaustion.

It's so easy to rule out other people's conditions just because they don't seem as severe as ours, but we're all going through different things all the time. One person's MS may not be the same as another.

We often complain as MSers about people judging us when we use our disabled permits, but is that not what we're doing to other people with an illness? How is it really any different?

I think the key takeaway here is to always be mindful of others' situations. We don't know what someone else is feeling and sometimes, people with chronic illness can be just as bad for judging others.