



# Developing New or Unexpected Symptoms

By Ilana Jacqueline

**THE FIRST TIME** I experienced a seizure, I was at a party. I had a purse full of medications for all sorts of symptoms, but a seizure wasn't one of them. Why would it be? I'd never had one. No doctor had ever indicated I would have one as part of my diagnosis, and I'd had no warning signs one was about to occur.

But, it happened anyway. It was humiliating and terrifying, and my brain felt like electrified Jell-O. I hoped it was a one-time episode, and after a checkup and hospitalization, I was told "Everybody gets a one-time free pass in life for seizures. It's usually nothing and won't happen again," so I was discharged.

At my next-day follow-up appointment, I had my second seizure right in the office lobby. After my face-plant, I was a wreck of emotions and stress. I had so many questions and, just as with most of my diseases' symptoms, I'm still not a perfect patient at coping with them. However, here's what I have learned about what to do when the unexpected strikes.

## Take a Minute

Call it your pity party with a curfew. After getting slammed with an unexpected new symptom, it's OK to completely lose your cool for a minute, or even a day. But try to limit that moment of sitting on the couch in your pajamas crying into your sleeve to about a week and a half — max.

Spend that time researching (and then not panicking about what shows up in Google images) and reading other patient stories about how they got through it. And, research all the potential new specialists who are going to help guide you through this new phase.

Friends and family may be knocking down your door, but sometimes you just want to go through the shock alone. Other people might feel if they're left alone for more than a minute, their brain is going to swallow them whole. Whatever your preference, your way is the right way for you.

pharmacy to make sure none of your medications will exacerbate the symptoms, and alert your other doctors that this is a new development in your case.

## Reintegrate

Now, it's time to slowly reintegrate back into your life. Don't expect your

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## Make a Plan

The shock has worn off, the pity party has all broken up, and now it's time to start thinking about next steps. Are you going to start being social again? Get back to school or work? And, most importantly, how are you going to start making smart choices about how you handle this new symptom? Start by interviewing new specialists, reading up on helpful material and checking out free resources.

Maybe you can't control this new symptom to the degree you'd like, but having a plan to help you deal with the physical and emotional ramifications of it can ease your stress.

## Be Safe

If your new symptom presents as some kind of unexpected episode or attack, it's a good time to think about safety systems. You may consider purchasing (or updating) a medical ID bracelet. You'll also want to call your

first reintegrating episode will go off without a hitch. Don't anticipate you'll be calm and collected or the people around you will be either. New symptoms are easy enough to manage in your comfort zone, but leave room for the learning curve on how to handle it in public places or social situations.

It would be a class act on the universe's behalf to put a little alert in our Google Calendar: "Nose Bleed, 2:42 PM, Wednesday." But on the off chance the unexpected strikes, know you're capable of bouncing back. ■



**ILANA JACQUELINE** is a 29-year-old dysautonomia and primary immune deficiency disease patient from South Florida. She's been writing professionally since 2004 on everything from health and wellness to celebrities and beauty. Her blog [www.letsfeelbetter.com](http://www.letsfeelbetter.com) is both a personal collection of anecdotes about life with chronic illness, as well as a resource for patients of all ages.