

## ELECTRONIC MAIL & GUARDIAN

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# Polio's delayed second strike

### HEALTH

**Forty or fifty years after childhood polio, victims encounter their disease once more in a different and little understood form called post-polio syndrome. Now a South African association has been set up to help survivors, says organiser PRISCILLA WEBSTER**

THAT forgotten disease polio is striking a second time at its victims of the past. Forty or fifty years after surviving childhood polio, victims are experiencing "post-polio syndrome".

The symptoms polio survivors are now, some forty or fifty years later, experiencing are burning pain, muscle weakness, chronic pain, breathlessness, fatigue, lack of concentration, choking, difficulty in swallowing, insomnia or sleep disturbance, dyspnoea during exercise/general dyspnoea and swelling of feet/legs.

"After eleven months and seven different specialists I have finally found out what is wrong with me - with the help of the Internet and an eighth specialist. I am suffering Post-Polio Syndrome, as are thousands of South Africans and Africans in neighbouring countries.

There are thousands of specialists in this country who have no idea whatsoever of Post-Polio syndrome. Most are too young and the others have not looked into the subject.

There are some who still remember the flu-like symptoms of the virus which left so many totally or partially paralysed after being in an iron lungs for months on end and having countless operations, physiotherapy, swimming lessons and exercises.

Now, an average of 40 - 50 years later those neurons are worn out.

Although Post-Polio Syndrome is not contagious, people who have it should not expect to improve but should only attempt to preserve what strength they have left.

A support system will play a key role in treating the syndrome because patients are in the best position to tell other patients how to eliminate the stress and wear on muscles that have been overworked for decades. People have to learn to slow down.

#### CYBERSPACE

- [Polio Survivor's Page](#)
- [Post-Polio Syndrome](#)

We who are polio survivors are no longer those cute little children who wore callipers or who were wheeled around in wheel chairs. In fact no one gets excited about us at all and it is to this end that we are going to have to 'get excited about ourselves' and live our lives with support and encouragement. For this reason, a South African Post-Polio Syndrome Association has been formed.

There will be chapters in all provinces where PPS sufferers can get together under the auspices of the Association.

The primary treatment is modification of your lifestyle. People with PPS also need to learn to regain their dignity as normal human beings and learn to trust those who are trying, in good faith, to help them. That in itself can be a monumental task.

You do not need to be happy about your condition but you must accept it. There is no need to wallow in self-pity because there is too much to be done.

All polio survivors interested in joining may contact:-

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-- *Mail&Guardian, December 9, 1997.*

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