

Christine Macklen

I had polio in 1956 and spent 3 months in hospital, in isolation for a few weeks then out on the children's ward. My left foot and lower leg were affected Obviously I had to learn to walk again. Strange to say but I enjoyed being on the ward because I wasn't having any awful treatment, and as a result have never feared hospitals and worked in one as a medical secretary for several years. Also, whenever I'm ill now I prefer to isolate myself as it seems to have programmed me to believe that's the best way to get well. I hate people fussing over me - just leave me be for a few days!! Consequently the covid lockdowns didn't faze me as much as for some people. I'm happy being indoors. Weird, eh?

I've been more fortunate than many people in that I'm still able to walk, though much shorter distances these days. In my 40s I used to swim 4 or 5 times a week, 50 metres at a time, head down, goggles on, front crawl, in the fast lane. I even did a few Swimathons. Now though (at age 70) I find it hard to get in and out of the pool safely and 20 lengths is about my maximum, once in a blue moon!

For pain relief I have a two pronged attack. First and foremost I usually visit my osteopath once a fortnight to keep my spine in better alignment. I've been going to him for over 10 years and in the beginning he helped straighten out my polio-affected foot enough to improve my walking so that now I can feel my outer toes more on the ground and there is less over-pronation. Now he treats my neck and upper back mostly, and sometimes my pelvis. It's expensive yes, (£60 a session) but I get so much benefit that it's really worth the cost.

At night I use a magnesium spray on my neck, my good side hip and down that leg and foot to ease the daily discomfort so that I can have a good sleep. It takes effect within about 10 minutes, absorbed through the skin, so it doesn't upset the digestion. Again it's quite costly because it comes from abroad and the delivery charge is high, working out at about £90 in total for 3 large bottles. That lasts me about 6 months. I prefer not to take ibuprofen or paracetamol.

My biggest problem when younger was buying shoes in 2 different sizes but these days I just wear lace ups or boots so I get only the big size. I get them from Hotter and choose the ones with extra stability. An advantage of getting older (I'm 71 now) so I don't care too much about fancy footwear!

I saw a neurologist Princess Royal Hospital, and Kings London who was very helpful getting a diagnosis of PPS but that was several years ago. She explained that I needed to pace myself to help manage the symptoms which really helped. But now I'm older, looking after grandchildren all day really exhausts me so I'm afraid I'm going to have to stop that soon. A shame, because I love their company but I need to "conserve to preserve".

I count my blessings every day and am doing my best to stay optimistic about the future. As long as I can still afford my osteopath I will be okay. He'd better not retire any time soon!!