

## **Testimony**

### **Lindsey Dunlap**

What if Diabetes was called “I’d think twice about eating that cookie”? Or a heart attack was called “abnormal muscle twinge”? Those names greatly trivialize the seriousness of both these health conditions. Yet somehow the one million plus people, just in the United States alone, are dealing with so much more than fatigue alone, as the name Chronic Fatigue Syndrome would suggest is our only medical problem. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is so much more than just fatigue!

I became sick at the age of seventeen. I was just about to start my senior year of high school. I was so desperate to be “normal” I went to the first day of classes feeling faint, nauseous, dizzy, and dead tired. That first day just so happened to be the last day I was ever able to attend any classes my entire senior year. I’d been an honor roll student and a member of the varsity golf team every year until I became sick. I wanted to go to college and study to become a pharmacist. I wanted to be someone and do something with my life.

I have been sick with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome for 7 years. I can’t remember what it is like to feel well. Sure, I remember I was able to walk eighteen holes of golf and feel just a little worn out and my muscles mildly sore. I know I was able to study, and retain information that I learned. I could fall asleep and stay asleep and my sleep each night was refreshing. I had friends.

Now the fatigue I have is insurmountable. I wake up every morning as exhausted as I was the previous evening. And a morning like that is good comparatively to the others when I was unable to sleep at all.

I am in constant pain every hour of every day. Something as simple as stretching to reach high in a cupboard can cause me severe muscle pain for days. I’m so sensitive that my bed has to have piles of mattress toppers because even my very soft bed feels like I am trying to sleep on a slab of concrete. I joke that the princess from the fairy tale ‘The Princess and the Pea’ must have had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome because I too could not get a decent night of sleep sleeping on top of something as miniscule as a pea.

My brain feels like it works in slow motion. I know I am not stupid, but the inability to grasp new concepts and make sense of them sure makes me feel that way. I can read a page in a book multiple times, with each rereading making less

and less sense. I frequently zone out when people are speaking. I hear the words they are saying, but my brain cannot put the words together in a coherent way.

I don't have friends anymore. Out of all the awful things Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has done to me, I often think this may be the worst. It's terribly isolating to be only 24 years old and have no one able to relate to you or your illness. I have nothing in common with the friends I had before becoming ill. They are graduating from college, going on to get masters degrees, getting real jobs, getting married, starting families. They are able to support themselves. That's all I really want.

To a healthy person, just one of the adversities I, along with everyone with CFS, face may seem overwhelming. But this is all we know. We are judged for an illness that makes others say "Well I'm tired too. Just stop complaining and get on with your life already." I want more than anything to just get on with my life already. Seven years are too many years to miss when you want to be living your life.

This is why we need more funding and further research to ultimately find a cure for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.