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Struggling to find a 'new normal'

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by **Claire Snyman**

During my recovery from brain surgery from a nonmalignant brain tumor, a friend who saw me struggling with the ups and downs of recovery suggested I try and find a “new normal”.

I was not ready to hear this. I wanted to be back to normal, not a new normal. But struggling with short term memory loss, crippling fatigue and medication withdrawal issues, I was frustrated by not being able to accomplish simple tasks that I was used to doing, especially as a young wife and mother.

Eventually, however, the words “new normal” became louder in my mind as I began to realize and accept a few new boundaries in my life. This may sound negative to some, but for me it was about falling in tune with my body and brain and finding their new minimum and maximum speed levels and comfort zones. My brain was more vulnerable than before the surgery, which meant that late nights, or too much stress or noise left me overwhelmed for days. This was the “new normal” that had to be integrated into my everyday life.

Over time, I realized the “new normal” was more about finding the “new me”. This proved exciting and daunting at once. Although I grieved for a few things that I was not able to do to the same extent, I managed to lay them to rest.

My transition didn't happen overnight. But there were things that helped me come to terms with my new self:

- Realizing I was a survivor, and there is something unique and amazing in that.
- Accepting and working with my new cruising speed, instead of against it.

- Knowing that it was okay to cry, get frustrated and grieve the ‘old normal’.
- Recognizing that finding my new normal could yield opportunities for learning, growth and a newfound respect for my body and brain.
 - Figuring out that while my life may not be perfect, it certainly has many perfect moments.
 - Living in the present is the best gift I can give to myself and to those around me.

Four years post-surgery, my “new normal” is still a critical part of my everyday life.

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