



‘MY ONE REGRET IS THAT I DIDN’T DO IT YEARS AGO’

Ailish tells us what completing the Living Well programme has meant for her

I am a 48-year-old mother of five, ranging in age from 6 to 22, and I have suffered with Chronic Pelvic pain for 17 years following multiple pelvic surgical procedures. I continued with physiotherapy and Pilates workouts and I did manage to keep my symptoms from getting worse but I was never without pain in my pelvis.

After the birth of our fifth child, by C-section, I also began to have chronic bladder pain, pressure and discomfort. A combination of conditions and the pain caused by them has had a harrowing effect on my relatively young life. I cannot sit for long periods, so driving, taking a flight or even going to the cinema is very hard for me. Intimacy has had many challenges and this has been so very difficult for myself and my husband. Exercise, shopping and most lively activities are not possible for me due to pain and incontinence. I cannot dance any more at weddings or family events and getting a good night’s sleep is a rare and precious gift.

My GP has been a great support to me and over the years I have come to rely on a routine of various medications and a Tens machine to help me get through my day. These treatments all come with their own side effects, which also need to be negotiated to allow me to work and raise my family.

Chronic pain left me feeling depleted and defeated, I just wanted to cry and I decided I needed a different kind of help. A kind that would help me find

a way to cope. I took out my phone and typed “dealing with pain” into the search engine. I found the website of Chronic Pain Ireland who informed me about the Living Well programme with the HSE. It was a revelation and a truly life changing conversation. In that hour my life became mine again and after going through the resources that were recommended I came to realise that I was not just in Chronic Pain I had Chronic Pain. Chronic Pain Ireland sent a supportive email with links to the HSE Living Well programme. I called my local office and spoke with Áine and she was incredible. Before I knew it I was enrolled on the next available course and the course materials, including the “Living a Healthy Life with a Chronic Condition” handbook, were sitting on my kitchen counter. The course was delivered by webex and my employer was happy to allow me to take the time I needed to participate every Tuesday morning for 6 weeks.

The course was delivered by two wonderfully kind and efficient ladies who themselves suffered with chronic illnesses. I knew that I was truly heard and my issues were understood. It was reassuring to hear that the self-management skills and tools, they were teaching us, that they were using them on a daily basis in their own lives. They were not just delivering the course to us, they were participating in it with us.

I learned techniques to use my mind and imagination to distract

me from my pain and help me relax. This helped to take the edge off flare ups. I learned to be kind and patient with myself and I learned ways to communicate to my family, how I was feeling and more importantly how to ask for help during flare ups, how to cope with feelings of low mood and difficult emotions. We were taught the importance of making good decisions and weekly actions plans and were instructed on how to follow through with these. The course included information on the importance of diet, movement and exercise.

During the six weeks I shared my life with others that were all suffering with various chronic illnesses and we had many tearful, serious and sometimes hilarious discussions that were hugely beneficial to me and gave me solid support to put the self-management skills that I was learning into everyday practice.

After the six weeks were over, I was in a much better place. I felt more in control. I didn’t feel hopeless anymore and, most importantly, I accepted my condition would have good days and bad days. I had a new confidence within myself on how I was going to respond to the challenges that I would face in the future.

I only have one regret about this course and that is that I did not do it years ago. I hope more people get empowered and helped by this amazing Living Well Programme.