

STAYING BALANCED WHEN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE THROWS YOU FOR A LOOP

Webster's Dictionary defines the word *balance* as "a state of equilibrium; equality of distribution; harmonious arrangement or relation of parts or elements within a whole; to settle and adjust." Most people struggle to achieve balance in their busy worlds. Add a serious, chronic autoimmune disease into the mix and maintaining balance becomes quite tricky.

Examples of autoimmune diseases and disorders include: Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Scleroderma, Graves Disease, Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's Disease, most types of Vasculitis, and Pyoderma Gangrenosum. Although each disorder presents with different physical symptoms, the one common denominator they all share is that the body produces an inappropriate immune response and creates antibodies that attack its own cells, tissues, and/or organs. This causes inflammation and damage. According to the *American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association*, fifty million Americans have an autoimmune disease - a major cause of chronic illness.

For twenty-five years I have lived with a challenging autoimmune disease. One year ago, I developed another serious autoimmune disorder. Rather than focus on my type of diseases, I choose to share the coping strategies that have helped me maintain a sense of equilibrium. My hope is to bring comfort, light, and support to those who suffer from autoimmune disorders.