

New Year - unexpected lessons in living in the moment. 08/01/2014.

2013 ended with a challenge to expectations of how things 'should' be - instead of celebrating with friends, a stomach bug also kept me away from the other most delightful aspect of the festive season: food. I experienced fear, isolation and anger that I was missing out. However, in the end it was by paying attention to how actually things were, rather than how I wanted them to be, that got me through. With gastroenteritis there is little you can do except wait - an imposed pause in life.

The absence of appetite is such an unusual experience for me, and not being able to eat can be frightening, not least in its associations with being in hospital. Alongside thoughts of dehydration and unwanted weight loss, I also reflected on how my body knows what it needs as I gradually began to eat again by taking notice of what I wanted - which was what my stomach could handle. I knew that I would get back to eating properly and was grateful to have that to look forward to.

Strategies that I usually use daily for balance minimized how much stamina was lost, so I haven't had too far to climb back:

- 1) resting sitting up instead of lying in bed minimized reduction in muscle strength & stamina
- 2) avoiding sleeping throughout the day meant my body clock stayed regular
- 3) keeping moving around, albeit much more gently than usual, in short walks and stretches kept me supple
- 4) pacing activity and rest by listening to my body helped me to gently recover

On New Year's Eve, after 5 days of illness, I had two options: fight with myself, get upset that I was missing out and try to stay up; or accept I was ill - listen to my body and go to sleep before midnight. I chose to postpone celebrations of what had been a good year, after all New Year is just a date imposed by us humans on the passage of time. I was sad to be missing seeing visiting friends and family, so I spoke to them on the phone and made plans to see them later.

Recovering from gastroenteritis means a slow return to eating, social contact, and usual levels of activity. Living with chronic health problems there is even more of a need to be very careful how quickly you try to return to your usual routine. Going too fast can trigger a relapse or at least impact badly on levels of energy and pain. So 2014 has had a pleasingly slow start for me as I build up my strength and stamina again with plenty of good food, rest and fresh air. It was a test of 'going with' rather than against, and it brings a renewed appreciation for the small but wonderful details of life we often take for granted - eating, seeing friends and just living! Happy New Year.