

OCD and Me

By William Matter

I awoke with a painful muscle pull in my left leg. It didn't surprise me because the new medication I had started the night before was accompanied by a lengthy sheet of possible side effects. It was probably a tendon tear. That was just one of the many adverse reactions, and I was certain I would encounter them all. My OCD said so. Possible tendon rupture, increased appetite, sensitivity to light. These were just a few.

I had awakened unusually hungry that morning and immediately closed the blinds. Light was streaming in like lasers from the mothership. I struggled to read the warnings again, just to know what was in store for me, but I needed my glasses. Let's see. Yes, there it was: "blurred vision." As I struggled to digest the massive list of unpleasant issues, my cat approached for our morning ritual of "find the fingers" under the blanket. "Get away, Chloe," I said a little too loudly. "I'm not in the mood." Check the list. Yes, "irritability."

Unaccustomed to rejection, Chloe sulked away. I felt guilty. "Wait. Come back." Glancing quickly at the sheet, I saw, "sudden mood swings" and "feelings of guilt or remorse." Chloe easily won our game because my fingers were moving unusually under the blanket. Sure enough, listed third, "tremors."

I worried about how I would deal with a torn tendon and the other side effects that hadn't even emerged yet. Vaginal itching didn't scare me, but groin rash did and even more problematic was the "inability to hold objects." What if I dropped my hot coffee onto my groin rash? What if I began "to see things that aren't there (hallucinations)"? I caught something out of the corner of my eye. Was Chloe dancing on the coffee table?

Seeking some respite from the onslaught of symptoms, I thought back to my doctor's soothing words, "Don't even read the side effects," he had said. I repeated the phrase in my mind. Then again, possibly for comfort, but, oh, no! Listed fifth: echolalia. I was a quivering mass of side effects, each one manifesting itself in a conscious/subconscious and sometimes subcutaneous, taunting fashion. "How will I be able to function?" I blurted out. "How will I be able to function!" Listed sixth, next to echolalia: "irrational fears."

The list went on and on. I'd be willing to bet money I'll get every one of them, including unusual gambling urges. Right now, I'm staring at my hands and feet, just waiting for the fingernails and toenails to separate from the nail bed. How will I get a pedicure or manicure? How will I play "find the fingers"?

Okay, stop being irrational, I thought. That's number six again. And the numbness and tingling, I'm anticipating they will start any minute, too. Oh, and I'm anxiously awaiting the anxiety that I know is coming. I think my skin is turning yellow! It certainly looks like that in the morning sunlight now that I've opened the blinds to prevent loss of vitamin D. Maybe vitamin D isn't on the list. I'm probably confused—that's a symptom, too. I look. Vitamin D isn't there.

I'm closing the blinds now because I'm feeling a little lightheaded. Stop! This is no time for jokes. I'm afraid I may lose my fingerprints. That's definitely on the list. It would be horrible not to have any

fingerprints. But maybe not so bad. I'm scanning for "contradictory feelings." Damn! Right there, next to excessive hair growth. Following that is hair loss. Maybe it will be a hair net gain. Quit making jokes. Why am I doing this to myself? It's not appropriate, but inappropriate behavior is in the top ten.

Okay, settle down. I'm being ridiculous. Remember, my OCD is triggering these thoughts. What I really need is medication to help with OCD, but what if that medication has side effects?