

Danny's journey of living with injury and chronic pain

I'd been lucky in life not to have had much by way of injury, certainly nothing broken before nor experienced having to rely completely on others to do things for me as I rehabilitated.

When I broke and dislocated my shoulder that all changed. For the first time in my life I lost control of what was going on in my life, months of being dependent on others, months of not knowing what sort of prognosis and recovery there would be, long waits between medical appointments and getting the right support, and months of living with chronic pain.

I'd never really experienced depression and I don't know if I was clinically depressed, but life sure felt pretty lousy. I think much of that was from the pain and not sleeping, not knowing what lay ahead, and the sense of loss in my life. It was the loss of not being able to do my job and things I had enjoyed in life, and even be able to do the basic things. And I hated being dependent on others for help. I couldn't even move the fingers in my right arm, so things like cleaning teeth, dressing, tying shoe laces, and using a phone and lap top were a real challenge, and no driving.

The not being able to sleep because of the pain was the worst; I slept in the spare room and each night drifted in and out of sleep until 2-3 am and then it was easier to give up. The drugs would help take the edge off it for a short time, and better than nothing, but then it was back again. I learned to get by with little sleep and to get used to a level of pain.

The recovery coordinator was a life saver. We are lucky to have them in the military. They kept in touch and helped get me to see the right people, and faster than I would've waiting for appointments through the public health system. I did not feel quite so alone in having to deal with my injury.

The pain began to ease a bit, to the point I could get through with a rough 4 maybe 5 hours sleep. After a month I got the first movement back in my fingers (until then I was living with the possibility of getting no movement back at all). I stopped taking the drugs during the day as they made my mood lower and ability to think clearly fuzzy. It was a gradual recovery after that to the point now it's as good as it will get ('you've had a significant injury'), not perfect but I can do most things again and any pain now is mostly my own doing. I feel lucky and happy to be through the worst of it.

It wasn't a fun time for me nor those having to live with me. I understand a lot more about how hard it is to experience injury, chronic pain and the not sleeping, and not being in control. I learned to advocate for myself (after being discharged with Panadol and told me I would come right in 10 days) and that taking support from others and medication are important tools for recovery. I learned that recovery coordinators are awesome. I learned that living with significant injury is hard but that you just have to get on with life, realise things could be a lot worse, take the help that is offered by others, and know that most likely life will get better over time.