

I am a 62-yr-old wife, mother, and grandmother. I am not an addict and have never had any addiction issues. Until recently, I've been a compliant chronic pain patient and have been stable on the same opioid dose for well over a decade. I've followed all the rules and everything that's ever been asked of me. I've signed pain management contracts and submitted to urine screens and pill counts. I keep my medications locked in a safe bolted to a shelf. I've never lost a single pill or asked for an increase in dosage. In fact, as my condition plateaued in progression, I voluntarily reduced the amount I was originally prescribed without being asked to do so.

Prior to 2005, I was also a busy computer professional. I was diagnosed with bilateral Neurogenic Thoracic Outlet Syndrome (NTOS). NTOS is a painful and disabling repetitive strain injury that causes chronic muscle spasms in the neck and shoulders. These spasms pinch nerves and arterial flow in the brachial plexus area under the collarbone. The higher my hands go above lap level, the worse the pain gets until my hands actually go numb and I lose pulse. I was judged not to be a good candidate for surgical intervention. In order to try and plateau the progression of my condition, my doctor advised early retirement and I was forced onto SSD. I was devastated by the loss of the career that I worked so hard to build.

Pain management helped me to some degree, but the restrictions I faced due to my disability were daunting. Although I was not psychologically addicted to these

medications, my body grew physically dependent and any delay in getting a prescription filled in a timely manner caused debilitating withdrawal symptoms to set in within hours of a missed dose. This dependence is just one of many significant side effects that chronic pain patients face. As the opioid crisis escalated, these delays started becoming the norm, not the exception, and they were ‘entirely out of my control’. Physically disabled patients have enough problems to deal with on a daily basis, getting legitimate prescriptions filled in a timely manner should never be one of them.

Although I was stable at the same dose for years, the frequent trouble I experienced in getting my prescriptions filled became intolerable and caused unbelievable anxiety. It was during one of these delays that I was introduced to kratom. So I began researching it and decided to give it a try. I was shocked to find that kratom significantly reduced the withdrawal symptoms I experienced. In fact, it worked so very well that I eventually decided to discontinue the extended release morphine I’d come to rely on for over 10 years just to see how I did without it. Did my pain level increase? Of course it did for awhile. But I was very optimistic that there might be a better way to manage it. It took a little bit of trial and error. Eventually I found out what works for me and that was a game changer!

You see, what I did not fully appreciate is just how much the pain medications sapped my energy and motivation. I was astonished at how I’d gotten use to what I now consider an unacceptable level of malaise as I paced my daily activity

level in order to avoid flare ups. I found that plain leaf kratom allows me to function on a whole new level without any impairment or the troublesome side effects and tolerance issues of opioids. I've also been able to reduce the amount of muscle relaxers and antispasmodic medications that I need as well. This plant has the added benefit of boosting energy and mood, which is really important for those of us facing chronic illness. Even when well-managed, daily chronic pain is depressing and exhausting.

My husband is also a chronic pain patient from a failed back surgery and is oxygen dependent due to end stage COPD, so I am his care taker. My mother is 92-yrs-old and is still very independent at her age, thankfully. But as an only child, responsibility for her care falls on my shoulders as well. I need to be able to be active and alert in order to help them when they need me. Kratom helps me to manage my daily chronic pain and care for my family with focus and stamina much better than any pain medications I've used over the years. I've also found hemp derived CBD very useful too.

We chronic pain patients accept that we'll never be entirely pain free and that is ok. We are just trying to stay productive and as active as possible. If there is to be any hope to help solving the opioid crisis, alternatives like kratom and CBD need to be fully explored, not scheduled out of reach. I just pray the government doesn't keep taking choices away from us. Chronic pain patients need more options, not less. It's not right or fair to chronic pain patients to deny their right to make informed decisions about how to manage their

healthcare. Sensible regulation is needed (and welcomed) but not an outright ban! Age restrictions, GMP packaging and requiring lab tests for contamination are all warranted. The science is there for anyone who wants to learn more.

Thank you for reading my story,

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