

Living through the sting of disability - new mobility

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disability](#)



“ Maybe the sting of being disabled goes away for some people, but not for me,” says Hank Stampler. “ It’s just always there. For me, the sting of becoming disabled is different than the sting of being disabled.” Stampler, 44, who became a wheelchair user following a spinal infection 14 years ago, sees himself as a work in progress. “ Bad days can bring the sting back to me, but I’m learning that’s when I need to reengage, get out and do something.”

Prior to the infection, Stampler was a chemist working in a lab. Mixing chemicals with quad hands wasn’t practical, so he became a stay-at-home parent to his two young children. He muses moving past the sting “ probably means getting back into life, staying busy with activities not related to disability, finding some way of insulating disability so it’s not interfering with what I want to do.

“ I think to drown out the sting you have to get so occupied with life that you’re too busy to think about it,” he says. He’s quick to add that he’s not there yet and still struggles at times.

After a few years of learning to be more independent, he found he had too much time on his hands. “ Disability creates so much time to fill. I was parenting two young children, but kids grow up and leave. I didn’t plan for that.”

Getting involved with adaptive sports, working out and volunteering with his local rehab center’s peer mentor program helped him feel more positive. Connecting with other wheelchair users who saw disability as a new life, he began to see what he needed to do to get where he wanted to be.

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“ I let too much time pass raising my kids before volunteering, and not enough time thinking about what I wanted to do afterwards,” he says. “ I’m definitely more engaged in life since I began working out. I’ve also found volunteering is a good way to fill time and build up some self-esteem. If people asked me for advice, I’d tell them to get back to work as quickly as possible or find some meaningful activity.

Work is an issue for me because the skills I have are not transferable.”

Stampler also emphasizes the importance of a strong support group. “ Being surrounded by positive people also helps. Solid relationships are so important, and they and need to be nourished.”