

Kellie has a brown belt in Karate and her next challenge is “Black Belt”! This is her story:

I was officially diagnosed in 2011. Like all MD sufferers I was advised to go on low/no salt diet, which had no affect. Then I was prescribed Diuretics and Serc.

Now I am exploring grommets and the Meniett Device. I am thinking maybe a Gentamicin injection? However, my ENT says my life should be more miserable before turning to that. I have also explored other "therapies" like everyone who are desperate to get better. I've tried neuro physiotherapy; my handicap score was 80%.

Growing up I've always had "ear issues". In fact my mother said I was pretty much born with ear infections! I think my first one was when I was three weeks old. When I was about 15 years old I developed a double ear infection. My mother used eardrops and as she put them in I screamed, as they were alcohol based and out of date. I had wicks threaded into both ears covered in an antiseptic cream to prevent my ears from swelling over. After weeks of battling with that, I was finally referred to a specialist.

I live in South Australia and was referred to "a top ENT" at that time. He said it was the worst case he had ever seen. My ears have never been the same since. My current ENT has suggested that is perhaps where the start of Meniere's began.

I started karate because I thought why not. I couldn't stand up with my eyes closed. Karate works on balance, strength, endurance and discipline. I explored quite a few clubs before stumbling (haha excuse the pun) upon my current club. The really traditional clubs had no room to adjust for my needs so I respectfully tried again.

I train with my current club, three to four days a week martial arts and the rest of the week with my training buddy Ben with practice. We use weapons, swords and Kali sticks are my favourite.

My current club required medical certificates to explain my condition, provide me avenues to train yet challenge me within those limits. They are accommodating and provide me with alternatives to some syllabus requirements. I can't do spinning back kicks, spinning heel kicks or turning too fast.

The balance is always an issue. Some days are better than others. I'm proud to say the club I'm with make a few allowances, for example: we are required to do ground sparring. I am on my back with legs in guard and prevent the attacker from touching my head. As a technique within itself, attackers often run in circles to wear out the defender. I am allowed to say don't run in circles but attack face on. Of course, it's still scary and I've learnt now to control the attacker with my legs to stop them without telling them what I need (bonus). Every time I grade, there is a chance I will trigger an attack. With lights, balance, stress, the crowd, the noise. Thing is, martial arts teach focus. I have great instructors that ensure I can see their mouths for commands on bad tinnitus days. Yes, balancing on one leg to execute a roundhouse kick to the head is difficult. So, on the bad days I aim lower and get faster so momentum stops me falling. Like I said I'm not perfect but I try, I adapt, I give it a go. I got sick of waiting for Meniere's to find me hiding.

Honestly, I've had to overcome many self-doubts, anxiety and fears to get where I am. Prior to a grading (moving up a belt), I am extremely stressed. I worry about having an attack. I am simply putting myself in a situation where it could bring one on! However, my training buddy supports me and together we work out our self-defence demonstrations (required to move up) so that I don't spin. If I do, he holds me a certain way so I can know where I am and not stumble.

My husband always supports, encourages and cheers me on even though he worries about me.

Knowing my limits, working to challenge myself, ensuring I do everything I can to make my life "liveable" involves me pushing through each day. I'm not going to pretend martial arts fixes everything. I have had attacks in class requiring hospitalization. I have vomited, broken out in sweats, I have literally bled from being too dizzy to dodge an incoming weapon and got hit. I have cried in fear, but... On the whole I can say training in martial arts has been a lifesaver and a distraction and blessing for new life long friends who feel like family.

I think you have to focus on the good, the hope and aim there. Grieving over the slow declines, my out of control Meniere's does nothing but start the sense of dread for pending attacks and hearing loss, tinnitus and Hypercausis I suffer with.

I also like to think of it as a challenge for my instructor and how can I make HIM think out of the box and keep it challenging for me in his class - now that would be hard ha-ha!

If it's really bad, I stop. I don't train. Self-care is knowing your limits too. But I'm damn sure I can't sit waiting anymore, it's my personal preference. Great love and respect to everyone who suffers with Meniere's, everyday is a battle and we all get tired.

I am now in training for my black belt next year. I have another reason to smash it now!