

# What is the Spoon Theory?

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 [spinenation.com/treatment/pain-management/what-is-the-spoon-theory](http://spinenation.com/treatment/pain-management/what-is-the-spoon-theory)



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***"The healthy have the luxury of a life without choices." -Christine Miserandino***

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Christine Miserandino wrote about the Spoon Theory for her website [youdontlooksick.com](http://youdontlooksick.com). While her site has since gone inactive, you hop onto YouTube to watch Christine's keynote speech on the Spoon Theory at the 2010 NC Annual Lupus Summit.

The theory came to life in a late-night diner in New York. Christine took some of her medications with a snack, as she often did. Her close friend asked her what it was like to live with Lupus. What was it like to be Christine every day?

Christine was shocked by the question because she had assumed that her friend already knew everything she needed to know. They were very close, and Christine's friend had accompanied her to many doctor's appointments and had seen the darker side of Lupus often. Her friend wasn't asking what the disease was, though. She was asking what it felt like to be Christine. Thus, the Spoon Theory was born.

## Why Spoons?

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Christine was at a loss for how to explain what it felt like to be a person living with a chronic invisible illness. Lacking more sophisticated prompts, she grabbed spoons off of every free table in the diner. "Here you go," she said to her friend, "you have Lupus." Her friend was understandably confused.

Christine went on to explain that those living with chronic illness, or, in the case of BackerNation members, chronic back pain and spine conditions, have to make choices that able-bodied or neurotypical folks don't have to make. If we all start our day with a bouquet of spoons, we must decide how to spend them wisely.

For example, a person living without chronic pain or illness may only use one spoon to get up in the morning, shower, and get dressed and prepared for the workday. A person living with chronic pain and spine conditions may use four spoons. They may need to utilize tools such as shower chairs or long-handled sponges and loofas to wash their bodies since bending is painful.

## **How Do The Spoons Work?**

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Christine and her friend walked through the exercise of using spoons and losing spoons. There were 12 spoons to begin with and they walked through daily tasks and chores. Christine was in charge of taking away her friend's spoons. She wanted her to experience what it was like having an invisible force control her energy levels and how many spoons she used. She wanted her to know what it was like to live with a finite number of spoons.

The lesson concluded with this: Once your spoons are gone, they're gone. Many people living with chronic pain, spine conditions, or invisible illness may end their day with negative spoons. Christine told her friend that healthy people have the luxury of not having to make choices. They don't face having to regularly choose between fun and chores, work or family obligations, cooking and eating dinner, or ordering takeout.

## **Who or What are Spoonies?**

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When Christine first published her piece, it caught on like wildfire among the Lupus community. It began to spread among other communities of people living with chronic health conditions and autoimmune diseases as well. Eventually, people living with chronic back pain and spine conditions caught wind of it as well.

A large, global community of people began to refer to themselves as Spoonies.

As people living with chronic back pain and spine conditions can attest, it is crucial to work on one's mindset. When living with high levels of pain frequently, even daily, it can be easy to become depressed and anxious. The subconscious never turns off. It absorbs everything we feed it throughout every day.

Some find that speaking of pain and its impact on their life in the context of spoons can help their mindset. Instead of saying, "I can't do that, I'm in too much pain," a Spoonie may say, "I don't have enough spoons for that right now." It's a small change, but when implemented daily, multiple times a day, this strategy can keep Spoonies in a better place emotionally and psychologically.

***"When other people can simply do things, I have to attack it and make a plan like I am strategizing a war." - Christine Miserandino***

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## **How Might the Spoon Theory Apply Practically to Your Life?**

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Spoonies mustn't feel the need to apologize for honoring their body's unique needs and limitations. "I'm sorry, but I can't make it to your baby shower today, I'm in too much pain," is a negative message to the subconscious. "I need to honor my body today. I'm out of spoons. Could I stop by later this week to deliver your shower gift?" doesn't lay guilt and shame at the feet of the Spoonie.

A Spoonie may also find it helpful not to "should themselves to death." Don't say to yourself, "I should be doing XYZ." No, it would be best if you were honoring your body's unique needs and limitations. Because without your health and wellness, nothing else happens. Relationships, work, your social life, will all suffer if you do not honor your body.

Your pain is real, but so are hope, treatment, and management—with a little help from your friends. We at BackerNation want to be part of your support community, whether you identify as a Spoonie or not.

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