

Self-Care Strategies: Staying Positive

"Being diagnosed, it was kind of traumatic, but I knew I had support. I knew I could go to them if I had questions." – Ann, Patient

Being diagnosed with a long-term health problem can be emotional. You may feel overwhelmed, frustrated, angry, depressed, embarrassed, guilty or just exhausted when you think about how your chronic health problem may affect your life.

It is ok to feel all of these emotions. They are real and understandable. But it is also important to reach a level of acceptance and begin to find ways to stay positive as you face the challenges that may come with a chronic disease.

After all, you are more than just your illness. You have a life to live. And maintaining a positive attitude while managing your condition can help you take the steps you need to prevent your condition from getting in the way of living the life you enjoy.

First, take control. Become an active self-manager of your disease so you have the skills needed to deal with the day to day challenges you face. Take your medications, make healthy food choices, get regular physical activity and get a good night's sleep. Take control of your daily decisions and make them healthy ones so you feel good enough to do the things you enjoy.

Accept that you may have bad days. There may be days when physically or emotionally you just don't feel like you can face the challenges of your condition. You don't get a vacation from heart disease or arthritis for example. And you can quickly start to feel burnt-out.

It is ok to give yourself a break. Continue to follow your treatment plan but don't be too hard on yourself if you need some down time. Everyone needs time to relax and regroup.

While you learn to accept that bad days will happen, appreciate the good days and count your successes – even the smallest ones.

When you are successful, find a way to mark the occasion. Too often we only remember the negative events in life. Instead, tell a family member or friend, about your progress or find another way to reward yourself.

You may find it helpful to keep a journal and make note of your successes. Then when a bad day pops up again, take time to look back and reflect on all of the progress you've made. You can be encouraged by past successes and that can motivate you to stay positive.

Your support network can also help you see the progress you've made and help turn the negatives into positives.

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But if there are times when the thoughts of how your condition will affect your future get in the way of your self-management talk to a counselor or therapist. Not only can a therapist help you deal with the emotional side of living with a chronic condition, but they may also provide you with some skills that can benefit your physical health, like ways to reduce stress.

And finally, pay it forward. Help others who are going through a similar situation. Volunteer. Lead a discussion at a support group meeting. Start a social media group. Helping others can empower you to feel confident that you have valuable ideas to offer, making you feel better about yourself and your health.

Staying positive while living with a chronic condition may be one of the hardest things you will do. But as a self-care manager you have the skills to be successful. Remember to:

Take control. Develop the skills you need to control your condition day to day, so you feel better.

Accept the bad days. Give yourself a break and move on.

Welcome the good days.

Take note of your successes – even the small ones.

Talk to a therapist.

And pay it forward.

Living with a chronic condition is a challenge. And finding ways to stay positive along the way can only make your life better, now and for the future.