

Healthy Living After a Heart Attack: Staying Positive

A heart attack is a major event. It can take time to recover, both physically and emotionally and it may be difficult to stay positive.

"I was terrified in the ambulance, really, but once I really got there and they said that's what was happening, it was terrifying."

After a heart attack, it's normal to have limitations on your physical activity, and you may experience many emotions related to the heart attack, including sadness, fear, anxiety, depression, and even anger or betrayal.

You may also experience memory loss, nightmares, or have trouble concentrating.

The good news is that in most cases, these changes are short-term and will go away with time.

"Mr. Morton, so good to see you. How are you feeling?"

Always make sure to tell your healthcare team how you're feeling and what you're experiencing.

The combination of physical and emotional changes can lead to extra stress.

Stress can show up in different ways. You might have trouble sleeping, or your appetite might change. You might feel tension in your neck, shoulders, back, or chest. It might feel like you can never fully relax or enjoy yourself without thinking about the heart attack.

Avoiding stressful situations whenever possible can help. This might mean leaving the house a little earlier to avoid stress in traffic or staying away from upsetting situations.

If you feel like you're having trouble recovering from your heart attack, find ways to stay positive. The first step is always to reach out for support or help.

Your family and friends can help, and your healthcare team is always there for you.

Support groups can also be an excellent resource. Your healthcare team may be able to recommend local support groups, or you can find support groups online through organizations like the American Heart Association.

Visit heart.org/supportnetwork to learn more.

Talking to people who have also experienced a heart attack can be very helpful.

Don't be afraid to find other sources of support as well. Community groups, church groups, and others can help you express your feelings and learn from others.

"You need something to help you with your emotional stability. If you have something that can help you with that-- you know, mine was religion. Mine is my faith in God, mine was my family."

If your healthcare team says it's OK, physical activity can also be a powerful recovery tool.

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Look for things you are able to do, like walking, swimming, or light exercises. If you have questions about which type of physical activity is safe, ask your healthcare provider.

If you are afraid to be active for fear of another heart attack, speak to your cardiac care team about joining a cardiac rehabilitation program.

Cardiac rehab is a program that includes supervised exercise, education for heart healthy living and counseling to reduce stress.

Cardiac rehabilitation provides you with a regular support group of people who may have also had a heart attack, other heart condition or procedure.

“People at cardiac rehab are great to talk to because they do understand, they are going through it, so it’s kind of that network that you can say, “Hey, I feel like this, this, and this,” and somebody will say, “Oh, my gosh, I understand.” And, sometimes that’s all you need is somebody to understand, not just tell you, “Well, it’ll get better.””

The most important thing you can do is continue to communicate with your support network and care team during your recovery.

Sometimes, just talking about your feelings can make a big difference in how you feel about your recovery.