

5 Tips for Dealing With a Life-Changing Diagnosis

Learning to cope

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Like it or not, life is a finite thing. Most of us will face a devastating diagnosis at some point—whether in the form of a [chronic illness](#), like diabetes, a disease from which you eventually recover, like a serious infection, or even something that eventually claims your life, like cancer. One of the many challenges of dealing with a life-changing diagnosis is that you might not know how it will affect you. There is simply no way to predict, and for some people, the uncertainty is almost as bad as the diagnosis itself.

Though there's no way to prepare for a challenging diagnosis, and little you can do to mitigate the initial shock, a number of strategies can help you make it through the ensuing challenges.

Join a Support Group

Doctors specialize in giving information that's scientifically verifiable, but not all useful information is supported by peer-reviewed studies. It can be helpful to know which diets, exercise regimens, or lifestyle changes have worked for others. A support group also offers you a judgment-free space to commiserate, and the chance to learn about others' experiences. You'll be able to ask questions about your doctor, complain about poor quality medical care, and get assistance finding the best care team for your needs.

Join a support group as early as possible. If you're [anxious](#) about doing so in person or don't have a lot of time, consider an online group or a message board instead. Just remember that information from your support group is no substitute for medical advice.

Ask for Help

Even if your relationship with your family is strained and you only have a handful of friends, the people who love you will likely be eager to help. The challenge is that many of them might not know how best to do so. Concerned about overwhelming you or intruding, they might hang back and do nothing until they get a clear request from you. If people ask what they can do or volunteer help, don't [shy](#) away from asking for what you need. The worst they can do is say no, but in most cases, they'll be relieved to have a chance to make your life a bit more manageable.

Seek [Psychotherapy](#)

Therapy isn't just for people who struggle with mental health issues. It can also help you devise more constructive ways to cope with [stress](#), particularly when you're stuck or feel like you're at your wit's end. Many therapists specialize in helping people make peace with a devastating diagnosis. Your therapist can also aid you to become a more effective advocate for yourself, and may even assist you as you share your diagnosis with your family.

Take Control of Your Health

Your doctor can provide you with lots of information about your condition, but no doctor can tell you everything. A life-altering diagnosis may leave you feeling out of control, but you can regain some sense of control by taking control of your own health. Some options to consider include:

- Reading studies and books about your diagnosis; steer clear of message boards and most Internet sites, which may provide inaccurate information.
- Joining a support group and exploring options that worked for other people.
- Questioning your doctor when you do not feel heard.
- Seeking a second opinion.
- Considering alternative treatment strategies as a supplement to your current care, including massage, psychotherapy, or acupuncture.
- Embracing a healthy lifestyle, including plenty of healthy exercise and a balanced [diet](#).
- Finding new ways to incorporate activities you love into your life.

Find Ways to Live With Uncertainty

No matter how much treatment you undergo, how many healthy lifestyle changes you make, or how much support you have, you cannot control the

ultimate outcome of your disease. Many people begin their journey feeling hopeful, only to feel crushed when a new exercise plan and miracle diet fail to cure them. Ultimately, you must find ways to live with this uncertainty and lack of control. The right strategy varies for everyone, but many people have excellent luck with [meditation](#), which helps you live in the present moment while steadily working to ease your anxious mind.

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-your-adult-child-breaks-your-heart/201604/5-tips-dealing-life-changing-diagnosis>