

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How to Ease the Emotional Burden of a Serious Medical Diagnosis

Learning that you are sick with a serious illness is a bitter pill to swallow. Not only is your body fighting a battle, but your mind is as well. As you strive to improve your health, it is important that you also take steps to care for your mental well-being.

Six Helpful Tips to Help Manage the Mental Toll of a Medical Diagnosis

Seek out support from people who understand
You may have the most supportive spouse, a great group of friends and a loving family, but despite their best efforts, they don't completely understand what you're going through. That's why connecting with people who share your struggles can be a powerful way to cope with your diagnosis. Support groups, for example, allow you to express your fears without worrying about how your feelings will affect others. In addition, you'll learn new coping strategies from people who are going through the same struggle.

Take a break and accept help
Even if you're feeling good physically, chances are the diagnosis will be weighing heavily on your mind. That's why it's important to accept help from others even if you feel you don't need it. This could include simple things like allowing loved ones to take you to your appointments or to tidy up around the house. By reducing your workload at home, you make space in your schedule for more relaxing and enjoyable activities that can give your mood a positive boost.

Relax
Living with a serious illness can occupy your mind and cause stress. That's why it's important to practice relaxation techniques that can take your mind off your diagnosis. The key is to find relaxing or fun activities that are effective de-stressors for you, and to regularly make room for them in your schedule. Meditation, yoga, exercise, reading, games and even a trip to the movies are all great ways to take a mental break and relax.

Take control of your health
For many, being diagnosed with a serious medical condition conjures up feelings of vulnerability and helplessness. Take back control and combat these feelings by:

- Following your doctor's orders and making yourself a priority
- Becoming your own health-care advocate by asking probing questions if you need more information
- Researching your condition to learn how to best manage it
- Following a healthy diet and exercise program that is approved by your doctor

Get away from the daily grind
Vacations or even simple weekends out of town are tried-and-true ways to relax and unwind. Whether it is sun and sand or a stay-cation in the city, stepping away from your daily life will help you take a much-needed mental break. Just be sure to check with your doctor to get the all-clear before heading out of town.

Stick to your daily schedule
While it is critical that you find time to relax and de-stress, it is also important for your mental health to
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remain busy. Stick to your daily schedule as much as possible. Find time to meet up with friends and family or take on a hobby that brings you joy. However, don’t forget to also schedule sufficient downtime.

Being diagnosed with a serious medical condition affects people differently. For some, it quickly becomes a new stage of life that needs to be managed, while for others it is a devastating blow. Learning how to best cope with the emotional toll of your diagnosis is as individual as you are and will largely depend on your personality, your condition and your interests. If you continue to struggle, seek help from your doctor or contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider.