

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

Trying to Stay Positive During an Illness

Even when illness only affects one of our body's physical functions, it can make us feel as though our entire being and identity have been attacked. Pain and fatigue wear down our self-confidence and leave us feeling like we've lost control of our lives. Therefore, it's not surprising that many people become depressed and withdrawn from friends and the outside world.

Although such feelings are completely understandable, it's important to recognize that your negative self-image does not reflect reality. Your illness does not define who you are—you are still the same person you were before you became ill. So even if your lifestyle has changed, you can still take control of your life and start planning for a great future. Here are some tips to help you start on this path:

Resuming Life

Even if you can't return to the same lifestyle you once had, try to gradually establish a normal everyday routine. For example, if your health permits, get up and get dressed each day. Start reading the newspapers again, watching your favorite TV programs and resume old hobbies. Also, the better you look, the better you'll feel. If you can't get out, ask a friend to help cut your hair or give you a manicure.

If your doctor agrees, start gentle exercising or walking every day. Exercise releases endorphins, which lead to a sense of well-being. Also try to reconnect with your friends. Encourage visitors and begin easing back into social activities.

Ultimately, if depression is a problem, talk to your doctor. Now is not the time to struggle alone unnecessarily.

Finding a New Focus

If your lifestyle has had to change, it's important to find new ways to impose some structure on your life, and provide meaningful things to look forward to. Here are some suggestions:

- Consider joining a support group.
- Take up hobbies and interests that you've never had time to pursue before.
- If your health keeps you inside, get to know the Internet. Start surfing hobby club websites and exotic places.
- Make future plans—invite a relative to stay, book a holiday or set a date to have your house painted.

Lifting Your Mood

One of the best ways to maintain a positive attitude is by brightening your spirits. Consider some of these helpful tips:

- Remember the power of laughter. Like exercise, laughter releases endorphins.
- Rent a comedy or watch reruns of your favorite TV shows.
- Look back through old photo albums.
- Treat yourself.
- Invite a friend over for takeout dinner.
- Spend time in the garden—it can be very healing.

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Though an illness can drag you down mentally, emotionally and physically, try to remember that it's never too late to regain control of yourself. When you adopt a positive attitude, positive feelings usually follow. Keep reminding yourself that life can and will get better, and you'll be taking an important first step on the road to recovery.