

The Age Sage

Dear Age Sage,

I am 62 years old and have just been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and am still in shock that I have to live with this illness for the rest of my life. I will need continuous doctor's care and medications. How does a person learn to cope with health challenges that change everything about the way you used to live your life?

Signed,
What now?

Dear What now:

Learning how to cope with health challenges is a process that doesn't happen right away. Understanding more about your condition and doing your part to manage it can help you take health challenges in stride. Many people find that taking an active part in the care of a health condition can help them feel stronger and better equipped to deal with lots of trials and tribulations.

Always keep in mind that you are not your illness, you are a whole adult experiencing a health challenge. Too many people see themselves as their illness and this thinking undermines their ability to separate and take control of the process of healing and getting better and stronger.

The coping process consists of a few stages that people go through at their own pace...just like the stages of grief...there is no rushing this process. The first stage after someone has been diagnosed with a health challenge is the experience of many feelings. Some people feel vulnerable, confused, and worried about their future. Others feel sad or disappointed in their bodies. For some, the situation seems unfair causing them to feel angry at themselves and the people they love. These feelings are the start of the coping process; everyone's reaction is different yet completely normal.

The next stage in the coping process is learning. Most people living with an illness find that knowledge is power and the more they find out, the more they feel in control. Research your illness to find up to date reports that may help you formulate questions and discussions to have with your doctor. Find support groups and talk to people who are going through the similar process...there will be an enormous resource for comfort and knowledge.

The third stage is about taking things in stride. The beginning of feeling comfortable with treatments and medications and beginning to explore alternative ways to help yourself. For example, changing your diet and exercise routine, getting more rest, learning relaxation and stress management, taking yoga or tai chi classes to tune into your

body, getting a massage for relaxation and enhanced circulation, and taking extra time to feed your soul.

TIP:

Understanding other people's reactions about your health challenges is important. Family members may feel frightened or even guilty. It's important to talk to people and tell them how you feel. Educating and explaining the facts of your condition can help them understand what you are capable of and allow them to see you as a strong empowered person, not as a patient or a victim.

Until next month,

The Age Sage

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