

Making the most of your life

- Are you finding it hard to cope with your health problems, and with not being able to do as much as you used to?
- Are you worried about the future, and about being a burden on your family?



The way you feel

If you have long-term health problems, you may need to adapt to manage many changes in your life. Your body may look different, you may be living with pain and other symptoms, you may be less able to get around and do the things you usually do, and you may need to spend a lot of time at hospital. It can be difficult to let go of wishing things were the way they used to be.

How we react to health problems can make a big difference to the effect they have on our lives. Everyone is different, and has different ways of coping. This booklet contains advice and ideas which you might find helpful.

If distressing feelings go on for several weeks, or are making it difficult for you to get on with your life, talk to your health professional about seeing a specialist who can help you.

Finding the balance

Having a health problem will mean you need to make some changes in your life. Try to balance this with keeping up the things which you can still do, especially those which are most important to you.

Give yourself time to adapt to the changes in your life, but plan your days so that you don't have time to get lost in worries about things which you can't control. At times of uncertainty, it is good to keep up your routines when you can.

Your health problems might feel overwhelming, but they do not need to take over your whole life. As much as you can, keep going with the parts of your life that are not connected with your illness or treatment.

Think practically about what changes you need to make. It is helpful to find ways of doing things differently, rather than giving in to your health problems or trying to fight them by doing things exactly as you did before.

It can help to slow down and do things at a more relaxed pace, even if this is not what you are used to. You could also try taking more regular breaks, swapping between tasks regularly, and finding ways of doing things which are easier on your body. Planning ahead can help you do what you need to do more efficiently.

Asking for, and accepting, help

This can be difficult, especially if you are not used to it. Remember that you can ask for help in ways which make it easier for the person to say "no" if they need to. Think about the different ways in which different people may be able to help you. It may be that the people around you would like to help but don't know what kind of help you need

You may find that your symptoms vary from day to day and some days you need more help than others. You will find that other people have different ways of doing everyday tasks and may not do them as you would, but it may be that your way is not the only way of getting things done!

Take care of yourself

Make looking after yourself a priority. This will help you to regain some control over your life and will give you more energy, which you can use to take care of the people you care about.

Try to balance the things which you need to do, and which give you a sense of achievement, with the things you can do for pleasure. Learn not to take on too much and practise saying 'no' to the things you no longer have the energy for. Take time to do the things that you enjoy doing and that help you to relax your mind and body.

Eat as well, and keep as active, as you can. Both of these will lift your mood, as well as helping you feel better physically. Physical activity can be whatever you can manage. It could be some simple stretches in a chair, or a short walk. Ask your health professional if you are unsure.

Allow yourself enough time to rest. Try not to worry if you are not sleeping well. This is common when someone is in pain, or coping with changes in their life.

Tackling problems

When you have a lot to cope with, it can be tempting to try to avoid thinking about any of it. However, this tends to lead to them playing on your mind and making you feel worse. Taking time to tackle problems and plan ahead will help you build your confidence. If you can, ask for advice and talk over important problems with someone you can trust.

Try making a list of all the things that are troubling you. Pick out one you can do something about and make another list of everything you could possibly do about it. Choose the solution which seems best and write down how you will do it. You might need to break it down into stages. Remember your strengths and how you have coped with similar problems in the past.

What do you value most in life?

Finding ways to do the things which matter most to you will help you feel happier and more in control. If something seems impossible right now, try setting goals, breaking them down into smaller steps and thinking about what help you might need, or how you might approach them differently.

It is important to plan for the future, but also to live each day, and to take time to enjoy the small pleasures of life.

Think about what is most important to you. Perhaps it is being a good parent, or contributing to the community where you live. If you are physically less strong than you used to be, you might not be able to fulfill these roles in the same ways you used to, but perhaps there are other, equally valuable, things you can do. Maybe you have more wisdom and experience to offer these days.

Talk to the people around you

It can be difficult to talk about your health problems with those close to you. You may be concerned that this will worry or upset them. On the other hand, it may be that they are worried about you and want to help but do not know what to do for the best, and are unsure about broaching the subject with you. Try taking things slowly and opening up about your feelings a little at a time.

If you are the person doing the listening, remember that you don't have to have all the answers. Just listening can help a lot.

Young children tend to cope better with a situation if they are given the right amount of information to help them understand it, and the opportunity to ask questions. This might need to be done over time, rather than all in one go.

Ask for the information you need

If there is anything you are unsure about, do ask your doctor or other health professional. Not asking can lead to misunderstandings and assuming the worst.

Health professionals are busy, but your appointment is your time to get the information you need, and to work together with your doctor, to make decisions about your condition and treatment.

Before your appointment, try writing down questions you would like to ask. In the appointment, it can help to make notes. You can take someone with you to help you remember what was said.

Your health professional may be able to advise you on where you can find further information. When you are reading about your health problem, give yourself time to take in all the information. You might find that you notice the most worrying information first. Take time to get a more balanced view.

Getting clear information you can understand, and learning more about your health problem, can help you find ways of managing it and getting on with your life.

PALS

King's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

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