

Coping with an Illness Diagnosis

It is normal to experience feelings of grief and frustration after the diagnosis of an illness, and there is no “right” way to react. While this is a very individual, personal process, many people experience the following emotions:

- ▶ **Disbelief.** You may feel unprepared to cope with the news and unwilling to accept the possibility of poor outcome. This sense of emotional shock may last for a short time, or it may linger. Some people may prefer to act as if nothing has happened.
- ▶ **Fear.** Learning you have an illness forces you to face your own mortality and may cause you to question your values, priorities, life goals. Some things may no longer feel important.
- ▶ **Anger.** Anger, resentment, or asking “why me” are common reactions. You may also feel shame or embarrassment or wonder if you could have avoided getting sick if you’d done something differently.
- ▶ **Remembrance.** This may be a time of reflection and introspection. You may find yourself thinking about loved ones who have passed on or want to share memories with loved ones.
- ▶ **Unpredictability.** You may feel good one moment, and angry or upset the next. Give yourself freedom to feel emotions as they arise.

These tips may help you work through your emotions:

- ▶ **Balance.** Reach out for support when you need it. Allow yourself time for personal reflection.
- ▶ **Express your feelings.** Talk, cry, share anger in safe ways, create art, or journal. Reach out to others who may be going through the same experience.
- ▶ **Be accepting.** Your friends and family may be experiencing feelings of grief or fear, and colleagues may have negative or fearful reactions to the news. Understand that it may be a time of strong emotions for everyone.
- ▶ **Identify unfinished business.** If you have outstanding hurts or grudges with friends or loved ones, this may be a good time to sort things out and seek reconciliation.

When to seek help:

- ▶ You feel unable to cope with your situation.
- ▶ You think you shouldn’t be reacting the way you are.
- ▶ You can’t understand your feelings or find them overwhelming.
- ▶ Losses or traumas that had seemed in the past come back to you.
- ▶ Alcohol or other drugs become a means of easing your distress.

LifeMatters is available 24/7/365 to assist you with feelings related to your own or a friend or loved one’s illness. Please call.


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