



# Life-Altering Diagnosis?

Five Important Things To Do When  
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Receiving an unexpected diagnosis from your doctor, especially if it is cancer or another life-altering condition, can rock your world and disrupt your life. You may have thought you were healthy, only to find out you were not. It is difficult to process that the future you envisioned may now look different.

With no experience in how to navigate your “new normal,” life can feel overwhelming, depressing, and isolating. Drawing from my personal experiences as a physician, caregiver, and cancer survivor, I’ve gained valuable insights into actions that can help.

Here are the top five I recommend:



# 1



## Develop a positive “warrior” mindset

After you have mentally processed the diagnosis and have a treatment plan in place, it is important to avoid developing the “victim” mentality. This is when you will want to focus on what you need to do to make your quality of life as good as possible. The key is to avoid letting the illness or diagnosis define you. You are not the disease, you are a person with the disease. I love this quote – “Your mind is a garden, your thoughts are the seeds. The harvest will bring either flowers or weeds.” Seek out a support group or enlist a “tribe” of friends who will be there to support you on rough days. There are support groups for almost every significant diagnosis. You can find them by Googling the name of the disease and “support group”. Example: Multiple Sclerosis Support Groups near me.

## Allow others to help when they offer

This is hard for many people who are accustomed to doing things themselves. When someone offers help, be specific about what they can do for you. Don't feel guilty about this. Remember, they are offering. Examples are taking your dog for a walk if you are unable to, bringing a meal, having the lawn mowed, picking up children from school, or simply coming over to sit with you.

# 2



# 3

## Focus on gratitude

Each of us has something to be grateful for regardless of our circumstances. I encourage you to spend ten minutes journaling every morning. First, write down three things you are thankful for. When we focus on gratitude, it helps keep the negative thoughts away. That doesn't mean you may not feel fear, anxiety, or disappointment about how your life has changed – those are common emotions. You can write about those emotions as well. It is very cathartic to get those feelings on paper. It is not for anyone else to read but you.



# 4

## Plan for fun and laughter

I cannot emphasize this enough. It is easy to get depressed and to feel isolated when dealing with a health adversity. Depending on how much energy and mobility you have, try to plan things you can look forward to. This helps your mental health significantly. In addition, watch a funny movie or read some fun literature. Laughter truly is good medicine!





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## **Keep moving, avoid sugar, fast food, and sodas, and keep alcohol to a minimum**

Unless your disease restricts you from it, try to exercise daily if you can. Even if it is for just a few minutes. A simple, brisk walk can help. Our bodies release endorphins and a neurochemical called dopamine when we exercise. These chemicals help lift our spirits and clear our minds. Exercise also helps boost the immune system, which is vital when managing a chronic illness. Try and exercise outdoors or spend some time in nature. Getting in touch with nature helps revive the soul. Good nutrition also boosts the immune system and helps with energy. You wouldn't put molasses in your car's gas tank, would you? Then don't put junk in your body! You can trade in a car, but not your body. It's the only one you've got. Handle it with care.



I hope these tools will give you some inspiration and hope for your journey. If you take a few minutes to ask, you will find out that almost everyone over the age of forty has a story to tell – either their own or one of a friend or family member who has faced a chronic illness. You are not alone.

To get more inspiration on how others have faced medical adversities get my best-selling book:

*The Other Side of Illness: Unexpected Blessings*



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