

STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

Address Fears

You may fear for your future, or that of your loved ones. Fear of pain, fear of dependence, fear of being defined by your chronic health condition, fear of dying... these are all valid and normal fears to experience in the wake of a challenging diagnosis. Much of this fear is often rooted in one hazy concept: the unknown. When faced with the unknown, especially as it relates to your health, it's easy to take a worst-case scenario approach. But worst-case scenarios rarely come to fruition.

Most often, chronic health conditions follow a rather standard progression hovering somewhere in the middle between “worst case scenario” and “miraculous recovery”. When faced with the unknown, your mental state and outlook can make a big difference in your quality of life. Focusing on the worst-case scenario can quickly lead to a negative spiral of anxiety, depression, and isolation: all conditions which are known to negatively influence health outcomes. On the other hand, focusing on realistic alternatives to the worst-case scenario – and better yet, best case scenarios – can instill hope, happiness, and optimism, all powerful forces in recovery and healing.

You can be hopeful without being naive. When fear of the future or making a big change for your health has you down, don't be afraid to find hope and the courage to push forward by looking for success stories or outliers who have enjoyed positive outcomes, despite all the odds. Hope is a powerful mechanism in the healing process.

Hope is clear-eyed. It sees all the realities that you face, all the obstacles, all the problems, all the potential for failure. But through that, it sees as well a possible path to a better future. It's not guaranteed, but it's possible.

— Dr. Jerome Groopman, MD

Fear associated with a chronic health condition is powerful, but you can harness its power for good. Fear can motivate us to take a proactive approach to our health and to do everything within our control to tip the scales from “worst case scenario” to “best case scenario”.



Life is full of beauty, and wonder, and things, and people to cherish. A chronic health condition, even at its worst, only strips away our ability to experience some of them. What are the beautiful parts of your life? What will likely endure, even if your health condition progresses in a way which you fear?

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Addressing Fear

Fear is a natural reaction when confronted with a chronic health condition. What we do with our fears — whether we allow them to hold us captive or confront them head-on — is a choice. Negative thoughts can impact emotions and behaviors. Cognitive behavioral therapy explores the relationship between thoughts, behaviors, and emotions and is a strategy used to address negative thinking and the fear it produces. Take some time to think about the impact of your thoughts by answering some of these questions:

- ◆ When it comes to your chronic health condition, what is the scenario you fear most?
- ◆ Are you 100% sure that this scenario will come true?
- ◆ What is the evidence that this scenario will come true? What is the evidence against it?
- ◆ What would you tell a good friend who had the same fear?
- ◆ Think of this fear as a “worst-case scenario”, what are two alternative scenarios you could realistically expect, that you consider “better-case” scenarios?
- ◆ How can you change your behaviors, goals, or mindset to shift your focus from the worst-case scenario to one of your alternative “better case-scenarios”?



Who in your life offers an example of hope? Do I know others who have faced similar challenges with positive outcomes? How can I connect with them?