

# 1

## *Diagnosis*



**Knowledge** All patients have their most stressful time within the first six months of diagnosis.

**Tell Yourself** “I can and will improve my life from here on out. I’ll use this experience as my wake-up call.”

You have the right to feel shock, disappointment, fear, self-pity, and anxiety. Consider doing the following.

- Try using the “worry clock” exercise. Set a timer, such as a handheld cooking timer or an oven timer. Any amount of time on the clock is fine, although we suggest limiting the time to 10–15 minutes when you first start using this exercise. Pull out a sheet of paper and make a list of your worries, from most to

least worrisome. In a second column, identify whether this worry is under your control, uncontrollable, or if you may take some action to partially control or affect the issue worrying you. If a worry is uncontrollable, and you cannot do anything to affect the source of the problem or the outcome, then strike it from the list. You should direct your attention and energy toward those issues that you may influence or control. In the last column, list all the actions that you could take to alleviate or lessen a worry. This exercise gives you direction and purpose. People who use it find that it lessens their depression and feelings of helplessness. Once the timer rings, you must leave the worry list until the following day. If you find your thoughts drifting to a concern during the day, tell yourself that you are off the worry clock and that you can devote time and energy to that concern tomorrow. Each day, you can evaluate your list and action items, adding to it and deleting from it. So, when the timer goes off, you're done! Dry your tears. Compose yourself. Seal off your worries, and get up and go on to a productive activity—one that pleases you and gives you self-satisfaction and a feeling of accomplishment.

- ➔ Throughout the day, if you find yourself slipping back into negative thoughts, worries, or emotions, tell yourself that you've spent enough time and energy worrying and sorting through those issues

today. You can go back on the worry clock tomorrow.

- ➔ Crying and feeling sorry for oneself is a common initial reaction to serious health issues. Remember to do this for no more than 10–20 minutes per day. Although it is important to acknowledge and allow yourself to have those emotions, maintaining your normal life routine as much as you are physically able to is more important.
- ➔ Most people find it helpful to begin a journal. Purchase a small notebook, and write out your story about this health problem. Start the journal at the point when you began feeling ill and experiencing symptoms. Write all the details surrounding your diagnosis. Write about your emotions, fears, anxieties, and stresses. This journal helps you to work through your emotions and worries. Keep this as a private diary of your struggles and issues with illness.
- ➔ No one ever says, “Gee, I wish I would have worried more.” Worrying or thinking the worst does not help you to get through this crisis, nor does it bring you joy. The goal is to be productive and happy, despite this illness.
- ➔ Remember: Allow yourself a maximum of 30 minutes a day to feel sad and down about this illness. Then, get on with living.