

SMART About Resiliency and Recovery

Resilience can be thought of as our inner strength that allows all of us to respond and recover from adversity. Resilience can enhance healing and help us thrive physically, emotionally, socially, mentally and spiritually.

Recovery from heart disease whether you had a stent, bypass surgery, a new heart valve, or a SCAD (spontaneous coronary artery dissection), or even a heart transplant or any traumatic event is a **PROCESS**.

That **PROCESS** can include:

- Acknowledging a new feeling of vulnerability
- Grieving the loss of your former more carefree self
- Re evaluating your priorities, values, goals
- Re defining relationships with others

So understanding the typical stages of loss and then recovery may help you make sense of what you have felt or are feeling since your event.

- **DENIAL:** shock, surprise. “This can’t be happening to me – I exercise all the time and eat well.” “This must just be heartburn.”
- **BARGAINING:** anxiety. “If I never eat red meat again, I won’t have heart disease.” “I will exercise more intensely and every day.”
- **DEPRESSION:** sadness, despair, loneliness. “This must be the end of my life.” “Why should I even try to make changes if this is all in my genes?”
- **ACCEPTANCE:** adjusting your belief system, values, redefining your identity. “You know, there are things I can improve.” “This really is an opportunity to improve my life.”

People move in and out of all the stages multiple times and in different order. Illness can affect individuals, families and friends. People close to you may also be going through stages of loss at different times than you. This sometimes contributes to difficulties in relationships as loved ones may be doing or saying things, well intended but not helpful to you

A critical piece to this process of healing and building resilience... is to **REFLECT**. Where am I? What am I saying to myself?

A critical first step in this process of promoting recovery and building resilience is **REFLECTION**. We need to hear from ourselves. What have we been saying to ourselves? We need to take the time to **LISTEN** to ourselves.

WHAT CAN HELP US DO THAT?

There are many tools to help us slow down to hear and become aware of our attitudes, beliefs, thoughts. Under stress we tend to engage in negative self talk. These are often automatic – a “knee jerk” reaction.

Here are 3 tools you can use to help you identify your own automatic negative thoughts (**ANTS**):

1. **JOURNALING.** This can be done in many different ways. It can be as simple as making a practice of writing down any thoughts, feelings, comments that come to mind each day. It could be a “gratitude” journal, where each night before sleep you write down one thing, no matter how large or small, that you are grateful for. You can make lists: 100 things that make me happy or 100 things that make me angry. You can use a journal anyway you like to help yourself listen to yourself.
2. **TALKING.** This can refer to talking to a close friend, spouse, family member who is good at listening and caring for you. It could mean talking to someone in your faith community – a rabbi, minister, priest. It could mean a professional – your PCP, a therapist, or social worker.
3. **MIND/BODY PRACTICE.** Regular practice in meditation or yoga or deep breathing and stretching or taking a long meditative walk can be very valuable in helping you to hear more clearly from yourself.

We then hear more clearly from ourselves and identify what we are typically or automatically saying – what are most common inner monologue is. Only then can we begin to change that patten and challenge our thinking so that we can change those negative/fearful thoughts to those more positive, accepting and ultimately motivating. This more positive thinking is referred to as using **ADAPTIVE PERSPECTIVES**. This term refers to changing our thinking to “seeing the glass half full”.

Therefore, we need to:

- **HEAR FROM OURSELVES**
- **CHALLENGE THE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS (ANTS)**
- **CHANGE THEM FOR THE BETTER**

- Start with learning how basic lifestyle practices promote “EASE”

E EAT healthy

- Healthy foods provide us with the energy needed to stay active and the nutrients needed to buffer and recover from stress.
- Eating slowly allows us to tune into cues from our body that we are full, preventing overeating.
- Eating in a calm manner and with awareness improves digestion, absorption of nutrients, promotes relaxation and can enhance enjoyment of meals.

A Stay **ACTIVE - Exercise and physical activity:**

- Buffers our body’s reaction to stress and enhances recovery from stress
- Releases muscle tension promoting relaxation
- Boosts mood through the release of brain chemicals and better sleep
- enhances memory and ability to plan which can increase confidence and success in meeting goals
- Stretching, gentle yoga and Tai Chi/Qi Gong emphasize focusing on breath while moving or holding poses. These practices can promote muscle relaxation, concentration, coordination, balance and improved energy.

S SLEEP well. Sleep:

- of 7-8 hours is essential for optimal body and brain health
- boosts mood, energy and motivation to exercise, and attend social activities
- Affects hormones involved in regulating appetite
- Enhances memory, learning new skills (physical and mental) and athletic performance
- Deprivation increases risk of medical problems such as obesity, diabetes, depression, anxiety
- Can be enhanced by sleep hygiene which is attention to caffeine, alcohol, physical environment etc

E Every day engage in mind-body relaxation. While participating in the MGH Cardiac Rehabilitation Program you will be taught several easy to learn relaxation-meditation practices that elicit the relaxation response and you will be given resources for guided relaxation using YouTube on your phone or computer/tablet.

Personalize your “go -to” list of ways to reduce stress, increase relaxation and promote well- being. Put a check by ones you use regularly. Circle one you are ready to learn more about or use.

E Eating healthy

- Choosing healthy foods
- Eating slowly
- Eating without distractions
- Other: _____

A Staying Active

- Daily walking
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Stretching
- Strength training
- Tai Chi
- Yoga
- Other: _____

S Sleeping well

- Planning for 7-8 hours of sleep
- Avoiding pm caffeine
- Relaxing for 20 mins or more before going to bed
- Eliminating electronic light/making room dark
- Other: _____

E Engaging mind & heart

- Humor Meditation Aromatherapy
- Music Journaling Prayer Reading
- Finding inspiration
- Hobby of _____
- Connecting to nature by: _____
- Contemplation/reflection
- Enhancing gratitude
- Enhancing communication skills
- Enhancing or expanding social connections (people/pets) by _____
- Enhancing time management skills by _____
- Taking time to reflect and “put a positive spin” on difficult situations
- Practicing replacing automatic negative thoughts with positive ones
- Practicing self-nurturing by _____
- Other: _____

Review this with staff at your next exercise session.