

The psychological side of medical tests

The days or weeks spent waiting for a result can be harrowing, and then there's the result itself

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When you're waiting for the results of a medical test, it can be a stressful time filled with fear, anxiety and uncertainty about the future. It's not uncommon to become overwhelmed by what you're feeling, but you don't have to let your fears get the better of you. These tips can help you stay calm as you wait those long hours for that call from your doctor.

GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED.

Information is power, and when you find out information about the condition you're being tested for, it can go a long way to making you feel better because a lot of anxiety that

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you feel can be rooted in your fears.

"It is inevitable that when information is readily available we will seek it out," said Mental Health Counselor Angela Durant Turner.

"Finding out about your condition through medical websites or blogs can be helpful because it helps the patient to feel they have some level of control over what is happening to them and allows them to read about others in similar situations."

When you're seeking out this information, it's important to keep in mind that not everything you read will actually apply to you since everyone's case is different.

TRY NOT TO DWELL ON IT. Although getting information about an illness can help you become more informed, it's important not to

invest too much mental and emotional energy in thinking about the illness.

"Don't ruminate on it," said Alannah Arnold of Insight Out Therapy. "If you catch yourself having gone through the same information more than three times, then you ruminate and that's not helpful. That's just going to exacerbate the situation."

Good news may cause bad feelings

Although it seems counterintuitive, sometimes when people receive good news about their health, they initially experience some of the same depression that they would from a bad result. According to Robin McDougall of The Healing Center, this is often because people have spent so much time preparing themselves for the worst that they don't know how to process the good news they've received.

"They've prepped themselves up so much for the negative that they actually feel almost a little let down about the fact that it's positive," she said. "It can be a really bizarre feeling and they're sometimes not quite ready to let go of the alarm they have been feeling. It's almost too good to be true, so they don't shift quickly

When the news is bad

There's no doubt that when you find out you actually have the illness you feared, it can be

into celebrating.”

If you're experiencing these kinds of feelings, McDougall suggests that you be gentle with yourself and allow yourself to feel what you're feeling until you're ready to let the relief set in.

Less

devastating. People who receive this kind of news can become deeply depressed and feel like their life is over. But just as you can work to get through the physical challenges, you can also find ways to cope with your diagnosis emotionally.

GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED. If you have a strong support system of good friends and family, don't shut them out of this process. Allow them to be there for you and help you work through the emotions you're feeling.

If you don't have a strong support system of people you can trust with your delicate feelings, you may be able to find illness-specific support groups at local medical centers, or even on the Internet.

Also, you may want to consult a therapist who specializes in counseling people with medical challenges.

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FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE. Even though you're having health challenges, there are still positive things going on in your life that you can be happy about. By focusing on those things, it can help you lift your spirits as you cope with your diagnosis.

WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR DOCTOR. People often feel better when they are a proactive participant in their medical treatments. By working closely with your doctor—and always voicing your questions and concerns—you can be an active participant in coming up with a plan that works for you.

In addition to trusting your doctor, you can also take solace in the fact that medicine is always advancing and improving.

“It is important to realize that medicine in 2012 is not the same as it was even five years ago,” said Turner. “Medicine today uses the latest techniques, technologies and the most well-trained medical personnel in history. This should be comforting to any patient.”

BE KIND TO YOURSELF. You're going to feel a lot of different emotions as you integrate your diagnosis into your identity. Give yourself permission to process your emotions and thoughts, and give yourself the time you need to find peace with what's going on. Also, be sure to pamper yourself during this time and do the things that you enjoy to make yourself feel better.