

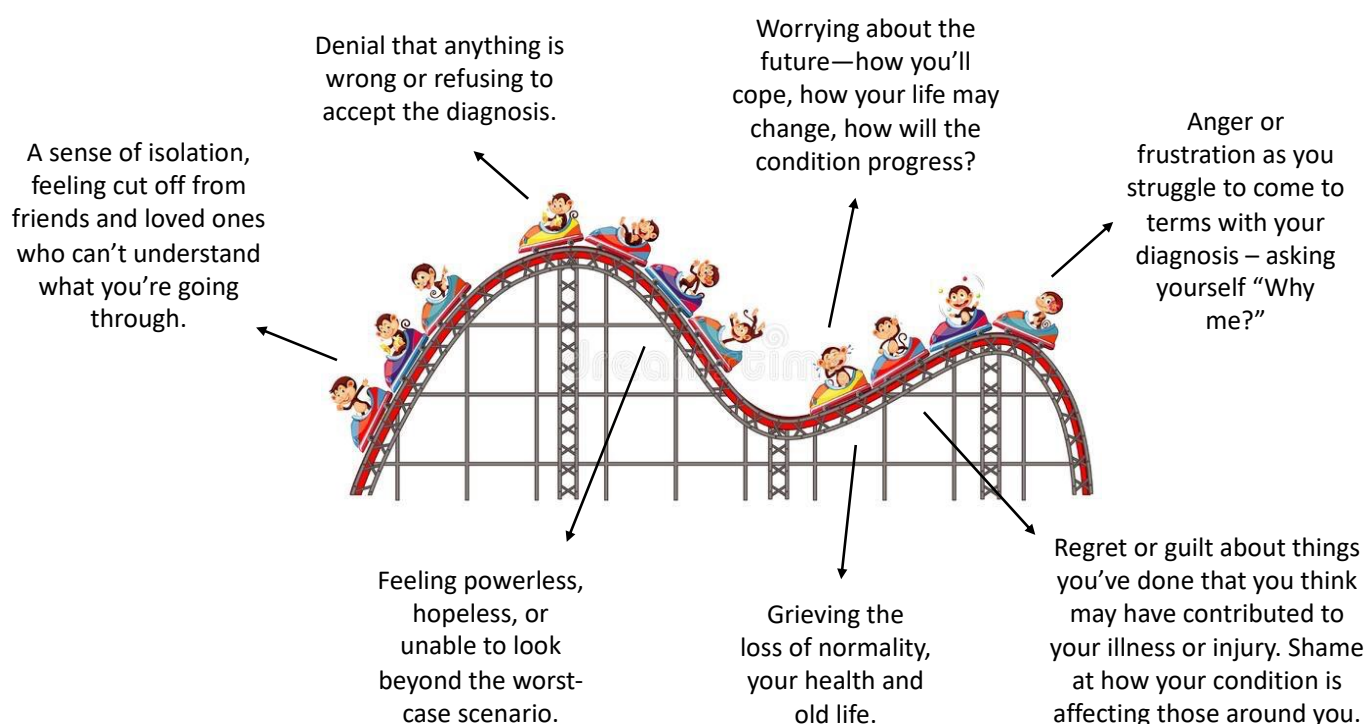
Coping with a new health condition

Information for young people



A new diagnosis of a health condition can happen unexpectedly or can feel like a relief after a long time with unexplained symptoms that have caused you worry. Processing the news can take some time and lead to difficult thoughts and feelings. Some young people describe the process as like being on an emotional rollercoaster.

Common emotional responses include:



It is important to remember that you are not alone; statistics show that 15–20% of young people have a health issue that involves regular treatment or medical care. There's no right or wrong way to respond to the news of a new diagnosis. We're all different, so try not to tell yourself what you should be thinking, feeling, or doing after a diagnosis. Give yourself time to process the news and be kind to yourself as you adjust.

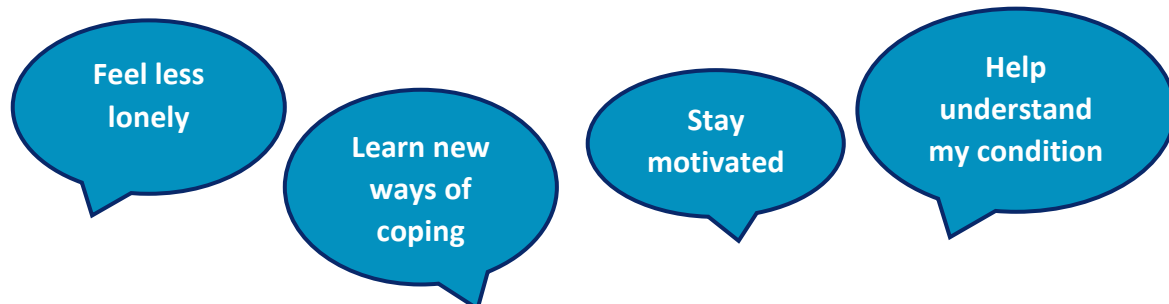
Allow yourself to feel: It may seem better in the moment to avoid experiencing your emotions, but they have important messages for us to listen to. Distractions can be helpful but trying to ignore your feelings or bottle them up may also make things harder. It's okay to give yourself space to feel. For example, you could try to name your feelings, you could write these down or you could talk to someone about how you are feeling. It's important to remember that feelings, even intense ones are temporary and will pass.



Be patient with the pace of treatment: After receiving a diagnosis, it can take time to work out treatment options. It's normal to want to find out more about your condition, but it's important to seek out information that it is from an accurate source or website suggested by your medical team. Turning to the internet could lead you to wrong information that could make you feel worse.

Reach out for support: Social support can have a huge impact on your mental health when you're facing a potentially life changing diagnosis. Having people to lean on is really good for your emotional well-being. Staying connected to others and continuing to enjoy social activities can make a big difference to your mood.

Join a peer support group: Facing a new diagnosis can leave you feeling alone and isolated, thinking that other people can't understand what you're going through. A support group can be a safe place to talk and get coping tips from others who are undergoing similar situations. Below is some feedback from young people who have attended a support group. There is a suggested support group listed in the resources on page 4.



Managing stress: It is understandable that having a new diagnosis may be a stressful experience. Sometimes, feeling really stressed can even contribute to our health condition or make it harder to manage it. Therefore, it is important to practice self-care as this can help you relieve worries, tiredness and boost your mood. The following suggestions can help you to manage stress and improve your overall health and wellbeing:

- **Relaxation:** Practicing a relaxation technique such as mindfulness or deep breathing can help you feel calmer and release tension in your body. An example is the lemon squeeze exercise or there are apps that have animations and guided mindfulness exercises (see resources on page 4).

Pretend you have a lemon in your hand.

- Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand.
- Squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze, squeeze.
- Throw the lemons on the floor and relax your hands.
- Then repeat, until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade!
- After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax!



- **Get enough sleep.** A lack of sleep can increase feelings of stress. You can try and get enough good quality sleep at night by changing your daytime habits.



- **Be as active as possible:** Exercise is a good way to relieve stress and it can leave you feeling more relaxed and positive throughout the day. Even if your medical condition has limited your movement, there may still be ways for you to get active. You can get in touch with your medical team for advice as it is important to pace your activity levels so that you don't become too tired.



Suggested resources for coping with a new health condition

Please find below a list of resources that other children, young people and families have found useful in the past. We hope that you find these helpful.

Suggested Apps: Breathing, mindfulness, and relaxation can be useful skills to develop to help you cope with: stress, anxiety, and low mood. These can be practiced with help from the apps below.

App	Helpful for...
Smiling Mind 	• Age: suitable for all ages • Provides different guided relaxation and mindfulness exercises • Free
Head Space 	• Age: older children and adolescents • Provides mindfulness exercises • Has a free trial
Calm 	• Age: older children and adolescents • Provides relaxation exercises including a visual aid for controlled breathing techniques
Relax Lite 	• Age: older children and adolescents • Provides relaxation exercises including a visual aid for controlled breathing techniques
Hospichill 	• Age: children • Includes different activities such as relaxation skills with animations, distraction ideas and other helpful tools for managing anxiety about a hospital appointment or procedure
SMS Connect Group 	• Age: children aged 10-12 and for young people aged 13-17 • Self-Management Peer Support Group for children and young people living with long-term health conditions. • Follow the link to self-refer: www.childrenshealthscotland.org/service/smsconnect/

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