Coping with a diagnosis

The first weeks after hearing difficult health news.

Being told you have a serious or long-term condition can turn everything upside down. However you react is normal. There is no right way to take in news like this.

What you might feel

Shock and disbelief
"This cannot be right." Feeling numb, as if it is happening to someone else.

Fear
Of the illness, the treatment, the future, what it means for the people you love.

Anger
"Why me?" At your body, at doctors, at people who are well.

Sadness and grief
For the health and the plans you had.

Relief
At finally having a name for what has been wrong.

Guilt
Wondering if you caused it, or feeling you are a burden.

Things that help

- **Take it in stages.** You do not need to understand everything in the first week.
- **Choose how much you want to know,** and tell your team. Some people want every detail. Others want only the next step.
- **Use reliable sources.** Your own doctors and nurses, and the main charity for your condition. Be wary of general searching and of forums.
- **Write questions down** before appointments, and bring someone to help listen.
- **Decide who to tell, and when.** It is your news. You can ask one person to pass it on.
- **Keep to ordinary routines** where you can. They are steadying.
- **Let people help,** and give them something specific to do.
- **Look after sleep, food and movement,** within what your condition allows.

Thoughts to watch

"My life is over." "I will not cope." Thoughts like these come from fear. Most people adjust better than they expect.

Tell your GP or care team
if low mood or anxiety is constant, or if you are having thoughts that life is not worth living. In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.

What I most need right now, and who I could ask

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