

# Adjusting To Your Situation

Learning to cope well with prolonged illness and hospitalization involves basic skills that you can learn to apply yourself. Here are four steps that you can take to help yourself cope well during your hospitalization and after discharge.

## Step 1: Learn All You Can About Your Condition

Most people fear the unknown and find it hard to cope with something they don't understand. Learning about your medical condition can help reduce fear and improve your ability to understand and cooperate with your treatment plan. Ways you can learn about your condition include:

- **Gathering Information** – In addition to the information included in this guide, members of your health care team can share additional information, suggest organizations you can contact and Web sites you might visit.
- **Reading Information** – As you read the information you gather, you might also follow-up by searching the materials available in our Health Care Resource Center located on the first floor, or contact our librarian for assistance.
- **Discussing Your Condition** – Talk with members of your health care team about your condition, treatments and therapy, what to expect and more. You may want to write down any questions or concerns beforehand so you don't forget. It is also helpful to raise these issues with your physician at the *beginning* of a visit so there is time to address them.

## Step 2: Know What You Can and Can't Control

As a result of your illness or injury, there may be things you can't control and things you can control. It is important to take control of those things you can. A few of those things include:

- **Discomfort** – If you experience any pain, unpleasant symptoms, possible side effects or discomfort, make sure to let your health care team know. Learn to be your best spokesperson.
- **Needs and Preferences** – Ask for help when needed, but do what you can on your own to maintain a sense of independence. Tell family and friends when you want visitors and when you don't. Ask friends and family to bring photos, books, and other things that may help you feel more connected. Participate in hospital recreational activities to break the boredom, and attend religious services at Drake.
- **Participate in your Therapy** – Be an active participant in your therapies. It takes effort to regain strength and build endurance.

### Step 3: Learn Ways to Manage Your Emotions

While anger, fear, and sadness are normal, learning to manage your emotions can help reduce stress and enhance your sense of control. You might:

- **Use relaxation techniques** – Relaxation is a way to slow down your body and mind. For example, close your eyes and focus on relaxing the muscles throughout your body. Occasionally take a deep breath and slowly let it out. Listen to relaxing music.
- **Get emotional support** – Sharing how you feel can help reduce stress, help you feel more connected and less alone, and provide sources of help and encouragement.
- **Think realistic** – Replace negative or pessimistic thinking with optimistic and realistic thinking. This requires that you refuse to make assumptions before having the facts. Rather than assuming the worst, ask your health care team what to expect. Do NOT undermine your recovery by saying “I can’t.” Saying “I will try” is much more helpful.

### Step 4: Focus on Things That Are Important to You

Re-claim or re-emphasize other important aspects of your life. People who are well-adjusted despite serious health problems still have bad days and can feel down. What is different is that they refuse to let their health problems become the focus of their lives. They have a life and they choose to live it to the fullest that they can, one day at a time. You might wish to:

- **Connect with Family and Friends** – Keeping in touch with the people who play an important part in your life can be good. Keep up with what is happening even though you may not be able to participate at this time.
- **Share Information** – Encourage family and friends to become familiar with your illness or injury. You are still the same person. The more others know about your condition, the more comfortable they will feel and better able to support and encourage you.
- **Talk to Others with similar health problems** – Any time someone faces a life-changing illness or injury, it can be helpful to talk with others who have experienced a similar situation. Attend support group meetings. Talk with fellow patients. You can encourage, and be encouraged by others who understand what you are experiencing.
- **Adapt Your Activities** – Explore new ways to do things that are of interest and bring you pleasure. For example, if reading becomes too difficult, try listening to audio books. Instead of gardening in the yard, garden in elevated pots in the home or patio. Try to be creative and willing to experiment with new activities or new ways of doing the old ones.