

Finding Resilience Before and After Bariatric Surgery

Make connections.

Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.

You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that change is a part of living.

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move toward your goals.

Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Take decisive actions.

Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery.

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a positive view of yourself.

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep things in perspective.

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Maintain a hopeful outlook.

An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Take care of yourself.

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful.

For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope.

The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.

Resilience involves maintaining flexibility and balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events.

This happens in several ways, including:

- Letting yourself experience strong emotions, and also realizing when you may need to avoid experiencing them at times in order to continue functioning.
- Stepping forward and taking action to deal with your problems and meet the demands of daily living, and also stepping back to rest and reenergize yourself.
- Spending time with loved ones to gain support and encouragement, and also nurturing yourself.
- Relying on others, and also relying on yourself.

Find the Silver Lining Activity

Looking at the **bright side** is scientifically proven to enhance our resilience. In a 2014 study, participants who went through such an exercise increased their resilience, were more engaged and experienced decreased negative thinking (Sergant & Mongrain, 2014). Other studies have also supported the positive impact this cognitive re-appraisal exercise can have on resilience (Troy et. al., 2010).

Think about an upsetting experience you have had recently. It could be a small example (i.e., my kids missed the bus this morning). Rather than focusing on the frustration of the experience, reflect on three positive things about it. Maybe it offered you time to have a special talk with your child on the way to school, or allowed you to see the sunrise from a different place, etc.

Seek out a new **flow experience** that optimally engages your attention and leaves you with a sense of accomplishing a goal. As you explore new flow activities, consider the following criteria:

- A task requiring skill and concentration
- Involves intense focus
- Is goal-directed

- Provides ongoing feedback
- Can feel both challenging yet effortless
- You feel in control
- You lose track of time

Three Good Things Activity

Positive emotions can help broaden your momentary thoughts, actions, and attention to your surroundings. One example of this is to foster positive thoughts and emotions. Says Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, the author of *Positivity* (2009):

“In our research program, we found that the daily repertoire of emotions of people who are highly resilient is remarkably different from those who are not.”

- Consider ending your day by reflecting on and writing down 3 good things that happened today.
- Be intentional about reflecting on the experiences, noting how you felt, and what was the best thing about the experience.

Find Something Funny Activity

Laughter has been found to boost resilience. A study evaluating humor induced **positive psychology interventions** identified the benefits of incorporating daily humor activities to induce laughter reduced depression and increased joy for participants, even months later (Wellenzohn, et. al., 2016).

Spend 10 minutes each day for 7 days on the following exercise:

1. Write down the three of the funniest things you have experienced, seen, or heard that day. Provide detail and note how they made you feel. If you can't think of anything, do an online search for funny stories or anecdotes. Social media can be a good source for funny material.
2. Write down why you found it funny. The more specific you are, the more effective the exercise will be.

Write these three funny things at the end of your day. Doing so will foster a new **habit** and may help you absorb the emotion more as you are going to sleep.

Perform Acts of Kindness Activities

Sonya Lyubomirsky research shows that one of the best ways to boost happiness and resilience is to perform acts of kindness, volunteering, mentoring, or even expressing gratitude toward others (Lyubomirsky, et. al, 2005).

- Consider a formal volunteering program in an area you are passionate about.
- Pick one person a day to show extra kindness to

- Display random acts of **kindness**, i.e., paying for a stranger's coffee

Gratitude Activities

The practice of **gratitude** is one of the most time-tested and proven methods for enhancing resilience. One study published in the Clinical Psychology Review confirmed the benefits of habitually focusing on and appreciating the positive aspects of life on resilience and well-being. (Wood, et. al, 2010). Researchers Robert Emmons and Mike McCullough found that people who kept gratitude journals experienced improved well-being (2003).

Select from the following:

- Every day for the next week, write down 3-5 things each day that you are grateful for.
- Start a gratitude blog/group text with friends
- Write a **letter of gratitude** to people who are special to you.
- Tell people you see everyday what you appreciate about them.

Turning the Obstacle Upside Down Activity

"Choose not to be harmed and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed and you haven't been."

-Marcus Aurelius

The **Stoics** had an exercise called Turning the Obstacle Upside Down in order to train their perception. It involves turning a problem upside down, so that every "bad" can become a new source of good. If we have a difficult person in our life, the practice would tell us that they are a good learning partner who is teaching us patience, understanding, and tolerance, rather than focusing on the frustration.

Consider a challenge in your life. **Reframe** the obstacle so that you see it as an opportunity for growth.

Celebrate your Differences Exercise

What others think of you is actually none of your business.

We all spend more time than necessary caring what others think. To address this concern, the Stoics endorse loving and appreciating yourself, fully embracing how unique and different you are.

Take time to reflect on your unique **qualities**. What sets you apart from others? What special value do you bring? How are you different? How can you celebrate others uniqueness?

If we compare, we despair. So, separating our individuality and not being threatened by the strengths of others is freeing and in turn, builds our resilience.