

The path to recovery: Healthy healing after injury or illness

By Teddi Nicolaus

Recovery from injury, illness or surgery can be a difficult and isolating time. Your experience may start with a hospital stay, where you are the center of attention for a little while as friends and family pop in and out of your room, send balloons and text upbeat messages.

Eventually you're discharged and sent home with some prescriptions, follow-up instructions and a pair of non-skid socks.



And that's when reality sets in: You may be facing weeks, even months, of difficult recovery.

"Even if you planned ahead and have the strong support of family and friends, it's hard for them to relate to the emotional and mental part of what you're going through," says Jim Krueger, co-founder of BounceBack, an injury recovery resource and app that helps people connect with others who are recovering from the same injury or surgery and experiencing similar day-to-day struggles, enabling them to exchange advice, inspiration and hope.

"This shared positivity and motivation can profoundly impact your healing

process," says Krueger, a U.S. Navy veteran who has experienced multiple injuries.

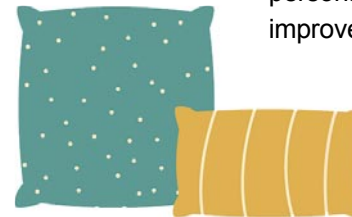
According to the American College of Surgeons, about 15 million Americans have some kind of surgery each year, many of which come with long periods of recovery. Millions more experience broken arms, legs or other body parts that require them to slow down, take it easy or take time off.

The good news is that there are ways to make your recovery process easier, less lonely and more healthy.

"Obviously, you want to prevent an injury, if you can, and not have to go through it," Krueger says. "But some injuries and surgeries are out of your control. Going through that with support can help you heal faster and make the process less overwhelming."

Smooth sailing ahead

At some point in our lives, most of us go through physical recovery. If you're an active person who enjoys physical hobbies, those outlets will have to be put on hold for a while. No matter your lifestyle beforehand, feelings of depression, isolation and doubt can get the best of us while everyday life is on hold.



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medicine. Family and friends can help you feel less alone. Connecting with others who are also in recovery can help you stay strong. Your health team can help you find support groups or resources in your area.

Pick up a pen: Journaling about your personal thoughts and feelings can improve your mental health during

your recovery period. Just grab a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, or use your computer or phone.

"Journaling not only offers real-time relief

during your recovery, but also helps you build lasting wisdom for future reference," Krueger says.

Create a comfort kit: Having a go-to basket of comfort items ready when you need them most can help get you through the rough patches during recovery. Your kit should include things that make you happy, such as nice-smelling candles, treats you love to eat,



essential oils, delicious teas, your favorite lotions, photographs that make you happy, or a soft stuffed animal. If you're having scheduled surgery, taking time to put your kit together ahead of time can reduce anxiety.

Above all, "don't catastrophize," Krueger says. He recommends that people who are healing try to find ways to laugh.

"For me, humor is, in essence, an instant vacation," he says. "Finding something funny that makes you laugh out loud can reduce your cortisol levels, help reduce stress and really help detach you from that situation pretty quickly.

Laughter really is one of the best medicines there is."



For the best recovery, listen to your health care team

When it comes to your physical recovery, your health care team will know what's best for you. Depending on your surgery, injury or illness, they may recommend that you:

REST: Avoid strenuous activities until your doctor approves. Stay in bed or snuggle up on the couch. Comfy socks and long naps are a must.

EAT: Recovery is usually not the time to be counting calories, as your body needs energy to heal. Ask your health care team if there is anything specific you should or should not eat.

If not, stock up on your healthy favorites and dig in.

DRINK: Unless your health care team says not to, you will probably need to drink plenty of fluids. Fill up water bottles and put them within easy reach.

You can also set a timer to remind you to drink water throughout the day.

MOVE: Once your health team says it's OK, move around. Walking is usually recommended after surgery to promote circulation and healing. Whatever you are advised to do, don't jump back in too fast. Take it slow and easy! And remember: To avoid burns or frostbite, apply ice or heat to your aches and pains only if your health provider specifically says that it's OK.



Keep in mind that recovering from a surgery or injury involves healing both your body and mind. Your doctor will navigate your physical healing journey, but your mental and emotional healing journey is also important. You're the captain of that ship. These tips can help you steer:

Connect with others: Studies show that social support is associated with faster healing. In some cases, it can lead to less perceived pain and lower doses of