

Building a Resilient Life after a Diagnosis of Parkinson's

A few years ago, a man attended one of my presentations at the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health. He had a natural sense of humor. Soon after, he decided to establish a Parkinson's support group in his area. He made one request of himself: bring a joke to each meeting and therefore begin with positivity.

“That commitment to stay positive and help others through humor and support demonstrates what we call the power of AND—Yes, I have a Parkinson's diagnosis AND my life is bigger than this diagnosis. For people with Parkinson's disease, this simple shift in outlook can help them build resilience.”

Resilience isn't about going it alone, and pulling yourself up by your boot straps. Instead, resilience is about facing reality exactly as it is, and using tools and strategies that help you live a meaningful and purposeful life. Fortunately, we now know that resilience can be increased at any age in any situation. Here's how:

- ✔ **Identify your strengths.** In a time of stress we want to lead with our strengths. People who do this have more control over situations than they realize. Our top strengths or signature strengths help us feel more confident and efficacious because they're who we already are at our vital core. Make a list of your top talents and gifts. Or, visit www.viacharacter.org and take the VIA Survey, a scientifically validated character strength quiz. Then, look for ways to align your day with those strengths.
- ✔ **Be present.** For people with PD, finding ways to feel less anxious and more in control is critical. One way to stop those high tension thoughts is through a daily meditation practice such as mindfulness or deep breathing. This will help you develop the habit of becoming calm when facing stressors, and once you are calm you can think more creatively and make healthier choices.
- ✔ **Know who's on your team.** There are three types of connections you need in order to build resilience. Your team should include credentialed experts such as doctors and therapists; non-credentialed experts, or people with Parkinson's who are further along the path



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than you are and are able to offer support and guidance; and, your choir—those individuals you bond with on a very deep level and can lean on in the hardest of times.

So the next time you're having a bad morning, take a moment to ask yourself three questions: What strengths are going to help me feel confident today? How can I remain calm? Who can I lean on?

These are the practices that strengthen us and increase our overall well-being. You want to treat yourself as your own best friend. Resilience is a choice and choosing practices that nourish you will change your experience of your diagnosis and will uplift your life.

Dr. Maria Sirois is a clinical psychologist, an inspirational speaker and a featured presenter at the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. She is the author of Every Day Counts: Lessons in Love, Faith and Resilience (2006).

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