



By
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You've heard those dreaded words: "You have cancer." Receiving a cancer diagnosis is often a life-changer and can be one of the most difficult life circumstances you may ever have to face. Cancer can completely disrupt your life and send you into a tailspin of fear and loss of control of the life that you have worked so hard to achieve. There are myriad psychological and logistical tasks that need to be addressed, and they

have to be addressed at a time when you feel the most vulnerable and destabilized.

Though it is quite difficult, it is certainly possible to work through these tasks and this diagnosis to not only re-stabilize your life but even to grow from the experience. There is a psychological concept called "post-traumatic growth," which is a process in which we grow stronger and happier through our difficult and traumatic experiences. Post-traumatic growth happens when we take on the cancer experience with a sense of strength, and we are open to the new perspectives and new understanding that can come from such a difficult time.

For example, many people who have had cancer experience a reassessment of their priorities, with a clearer understanding of

what is truly important. I often hear from my patients that life after cancer is much more precious and that they appreciate their family and friend relationships much more. They also find that the experience helps them to understand who their friends really are and gives them strength to release relationships that do not serve them well. Many patients I talk to find this to be especially freeing, and they are grateful that the cancer experience afforded them this new perspective.

Many patients also feel a renewed sense of personal strength and ability to work through difficulties. They often tell me that, at the beginning, they could not imagine how they were going to get through the process, but, when they do, they feel empowered and more confident. This

is a great example of post-traumatic growth. Often, when we are seriously challenged by life, we rise to the occasion, surprising ourselves at our resiliency and strength. Growth is possible even under the most difficult conditions.

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women's issues, women's health, women with cancer, grief and bereavement, relationships, and stress management. She is on staff at Doylestown Hospital and on the Board of Directors of The Cancer Support Community of Greater Philadelphia. She is also on the medical advisory board of the research database of the Oncology Association of Naturopathic Physicians.

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