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Your Inner Life

How to bounce back from anything



What doesn't kill us makes us stronger. True enough, but it sure doesn't feel that way when you're going through a rocky patch. Fortunately, resilience isn't just a trait some are blessed with—it's a skill that can be learned and practiced. "Teaching ourselves to adapt to small stressors will help us learn to adjust to any big changes life may throw at us," says psychologist Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., author of *It's Not the End of the World*. Here, a few techniques to use the next time you need to rebound.

Do a reality check.

When your mind jumps to a worst-case scenario—a slipup at work symbolizes immediate unemployment, a criticism from a friend means social exclusion is just around the corner—your body follows, sending out stress hormones as if the imagined crisis were real. Borysenko warns. Halt your escalating panic by thinking of concrete examples of all the times when the catastrophe *didn't* happen. "Learning how to accurately explain tough circumstances to yourself will make them easier to handle," Borysenko says.

Have a pal pick you up.

Sharing your concerns with a friend not only helps put your problems in perspective but also can help halt a cycle of negative thoughts. If you don't have a buddy available, give yourself a pep talk by imagining what you'd say to someone else in your situation. Chances are, you wouldn't be barraging her with the same pessimistic put-downs you're dumping on yourself.

Focus on someone else.

"Shifting attention from your own worries to someone else's can give you a helper's high, releasing endorphins," Borysenko says. Volunteering your services as a mentor or a soup kitchen aide can take your mind off your current stress and remind you how much you have to offer—and that you actually have it pretty good.

Exercise your mind

Give your gray matter a boost! Certain regions of the brain—especially the ones known for cultivating positive emotions and retaining emotional stability—are larger in meditators than in nonmeditators, says a recent study from UCLA, suggesting that a little "om" might be responsible for the increase. Don't have the time, space, or patience to Zen out? Start small: Meditation can be as simple as focusing on your breath as you wait in line at the supermarket.

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things to be happy about right now

1 a new envelope from Netflix

2 "my first a.m. cup of coffee—and my husband, who brings it to me!"

Elizabeth Harper, 48
Canandaigua, NY

3 holding the door (and other quick acts of kindness)

4 sweater days

5 a lazy, no-plans weekend (we dare you to try it!)

