

# 10 Ways to Cope With Big Changes

Change is inevitable. Here's how to come out of it a better person.

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The one constant in life is change. That doesn't mean we ever get used to it or fully embrace it, though.

Here are 10 tips for coping with big changes in your life and coming out a better person for it.

## **1. Acknowledge that things are changing.**

Sometimes we get so caught up in fighting change that we put off actually dealing with it. Denial is a powerful force, and it protects us in many ways. However, stepping outside of it and saying to yourself, "Things are changing, and it is okay" can be less stressful than putting it off.

## **2. Realize that even good change can cause stress.**

Sometimes when people go through a positive life change, such as graduating or having a baby, they still feel a great deal of stress—or even dread. Keep in mind that positive change can create stress just like not-so-positive change. Stress is just your body's way of reacting to change. It's okay to feel stressed even when something good has happened—in fact, it's normal. (If you've just had a baby, talk to your doctor about whether you may be experiencing postpartum depression.)

## **3. Keep up your regular schedule as much as possible.**

The more change that is happening, the more important it is to stick to your regular schedule—as much as possible. Having some things that stay the same, like walking the dog every morning at 8 am, gives us an *anchor*. An anchor is a reminder that some things are still the same, and it gives your brain a little bit of a rest. Sometimes when you are going through a lot of change it helps to write down your routine and check it off as you go. It's one less thing for your brain to have to hold inside.

#### **4. Try to eat as healthily as possible.**

When change happens, a lot of us tend to reach for carbs—bread, muffins, cake, etc. This may be because eating carbs boosts serotonin—a brain chemical that may be somewhat depleted when you undergo change (stress). It's okay to soothe yourself with comfort foods—in moderation. One way to track what you are eating is to write it down. You can either do this in a notebook or use an app. When you see what you are eating, it makes you take a step back and think about whether you want to eat that second muffin or not. (If you have a history of eating disorders, it is not recommended that you write down what you are eating.) Also notice if you are experiencing an increased use of alcohol or other substances; your use can sneak up on you when you are under stress.

#### **5. Exercise.**

Keeping up regular exercise could be a part of the "keep up your regular schedule" tip. If exercise is not currently part of your routine, try adding it. Exercising two to three times a week has been found to significantly decrease symptoms of depression (Barclay, et al. 2014.) Even just walking around the block can help you feel better. (Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.) Remember, you don't have to feel like getting some exercise; just get out there and move. You'll find that many times your motivation will kick in while you are active.

#### **6. Seek support.**

No one gets through life alone. It is okay to ask for help; that's a sign that you know yourself well enough to realize you need some assistance. Think of your trusted friends or family members. Chances are that they are happy to help if you need them to watch your kids while you run some errands, or if you just need some alone time. There may be a neighbor who has asked you for help in the past—now maybe you can ask them for help. Apps like NextDoor have been helpful for connecting neighbors. If

you are thinking about hurting yourself or killing yourself, please contact the [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) online or at 1-800-273-8255.

### **7. Write down the positives that have come from this change.**

Maybe due to this change in your life you have met new people. Maybe you started practicing healthier habits. Maybe you became more politically active. Maybe you became more assertive. Maybe the change helped you prioritize what is most important in your life. Change presents us with the opportunity to grow, and it's important to acknowledge how things have become better as a result.

### **8. Get proactive.**

Being proactive means taking charge and working preventatively. This means you figure out what steps you need to take before something happens. Being *reactive* means you wait until something has happened and then you take action. Being *proactive* means you make an appointment with your doctor for a physical because you know something stressful is coming up and you want to make sure you are in good health. It means becoming active with groups that help you realize that you can make a positive impact on the world.

### **9. Vent, but to a point.**

Having a support group to whom you can vent can be helpful—to a point. If you and your support group are solely venting, that feeling of frustration can be contagious. Try gearing the conversation toward action: What can you do to make things better? When people brainstorm together, their creativity and hopefulness can be contagious as well.

### **10. Back away from social media.**

When you go through change, you may gravitate toward social media—maybe posting to your friends on Facebook what is going on in your life. First, make sure you are in a calm state when you post—and keep in mind that whatever you post never really disappears. Also, if you are comparing your life to your friends' lives on social media, remember that most people post only the "highlight reel" of their lives, not the stressful moments. This can give you a skewed view that everyone else's lives are going just fine. Everyone has battles they are fighting; it's just different battles with different people. Step away from social media if you are starting to compare your life to others.

And finally, give yourself a break. In a time of change, you may feel a little out of control. You may feel like you are not living up to your expectations for yourself. Remember that you are allowed to do less than what is humanly possible. Nothing says you have to function at 100 percent all the time. People make mistakes—it's one of the great things about being human. It's learning from the mistakes that really counts. Think about it like this: There are no mistakes, only good stories for later. Make a point to incorporate more laughter and fun into your life. Laughing increases dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins—and that makes you feel good (Yim, 2016). Laughing also decreases cortisol—a stress-producing hormone (Yim, 2016.)