

# ACCEPTANCE: GATEWAY TO A NEW LIFE?

**Henry Lew, psychologist**

## **Acceptance is**

**to recognise the need to adapt to chronic illness.**

**to develop the ability to tolerate the unpredictable, uncontrollable nature of the disease and manage its negative consequences.**

**to live a valuable and meaningful life as realistically as possible.**

## **Acceptance is not**

**that we deserve the illness nor we deserve to suffer.**

**that we give up and do nothing.**

**that we lie to ourselves and ignore the negative.**



**C**hronic illnesses can wreck our lives. We experience the discomfort, or even pain, from the associated symptoms. We become limited in our ability to perform certain tasks. Chronic illnesses affect us emotionally as well, making us more restless, and irritable at times. And we are not spared the constant anxiety and worry about our health.

**The reality is that despite our best efforts, there are some things we cannot avoid about chronic illness. Acceptance could be one way to manage the impact that chronic illness has on our life.**

**But what good would it do us to accept chronic illness, you say? It may seem ironic or even cruel to try to accept something we are struggling hard to get rid of.**

**When we hear the word “acceptance”, we often think of giving up or throwing in the towel. But giving up is not acceptance or vice versa—it simply means the recognition that the moment is as it is.**

**Acceptance is seeing reality as it is. It does not mean we are stuck in the moment either. If we accept something is true in this moment, we can still work towards changing it in the future.**

Let's look at some appropriate ways to cultivate acceptance.

### **PERSPECTIVE**

Remind yourself of the perspective that the sooner you accept the chronic illnesses and struggle less with it, the sooner you will be able to focus your attention on what you could do to manage your life better.

### **FOCUS**

Constantly focus on the fact that although you cannot reverse your situation and return to what you were like before the diagnosis, your life can still be close to what it used to be.

### **TRANSFORMATION**

Focus on internal resources for transformation. You are a survivor. And you may have even gone through much worse times in your life and triumphed over them. Like in your previous experience, although you have no control over what happened, you have control over your response. Use those experiences where you successfully managed the impact of the adverse situations of your life to help you manage the impact of the current situation.

### **REFRAME**

Reframe the situation into a roller coaster ride. Chronic illness is unpredictable. There will be good days, there will be bad days. Recognise that the bad days will not last forever and learn to treasure the good days. As in a roller coaster ride, there are teeth clenching moments and there are exciting moments.

### **STANDARDS**

Use the same universal standards. In your attempts to manage your chronic illness, ask yourself sometimes if you are overdoing it, or being too hard on yourself. If you find that what you are doing will also make a healthy person tired, perhaps it is not realistic for you to do it, given your condition.

### **VALUE**

Value yourself. Be kind to yourself, and see yourself as worthy. Do things to soothe yourself instead of entertaining the self-criticism and self-blame in your mind.

Acceptance is a process and not a state. It takes time for us to accept. There will be days where we are more accepting. There will be days when we will be in denial or when we feel angst. Accept at your own pace but never give up.