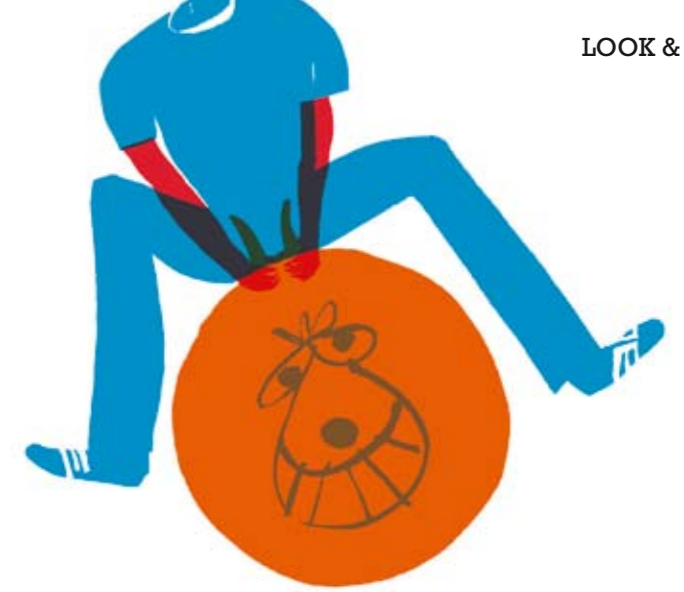


How to *bounce back* from just about *anything!*

If life's ups and downs are threatening to throw you off-course, boosting your emotional resilience could help you come back stronger and happier.

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Think about the people you most admire. Chances are, it's not those who sail through life as if charmed. More likely, it's the ones who seem to recover from adversity and treat every knock-back as a chance to learn, laugh or take a new look at life – the person who finds a great new job after being made redundant, the Slimming World member who has a gain one week and loses even more the next, or the woman who loses her mum and runs a marathon in her name. Emotional resilience – or 'bounce' – is a trait that helps us to negotiate life's ups and downs.

'Bounce is what keeps us from going under in the tough times,' says Sue Hadfield, a Slimming World member and co-author of *Bounce: Use the Power of Resilience to Live the Life You Want* (Prentice Hall Life, £10.99). According to Sue, people with bounce have key characteristics in common. 'They take responsibility for their actions rather than blaming others,' she says. 'They think positively, are able to reflect on a difficult situation, and share how they feel with those close to them.'

The good news is that we can teach ourselves to bounce back. 'Life will be painful sometimes, but we can learn not to make it worse by layering self-criticism and

self-blame on an already difficult situation,' says Paul Gilbert, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Head of the Research Unit at the University of Derby, who specialises in 'compassionate therapy'.

According to Professor Gilbert, the first step in developing emotional resilience is to recognise when we're caught in a cycle of negative thinking and break it by distracting ourselves – perhaps with a phone call to a friend or something else you love doing. He suggests that taking some time to reflect on our experience and how we're feeling, perhaps by writing down our thoughts, will often help. Lastly, Professor Gilbert emphasises the importance of being kind to ourselves. 'We'd always try to help a friend who was upset, yet we don't believe we deserve the same compassionate support,' he says. 'When you're feeling overwhelmed, imagine how someone else would support you. I sometimes suggest to people that they write themselves the kind of letter they'd write to a friend in a similar situation. This helps direct you away from self-criticism and puts you in a position to tackle the problem.'

Take this approach and we'll become stronger, happier, more emotionally resilient and ready to bounce back from whatever life may throw at us. »

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BOUNCE BACK FROM... a break-up

At the end of a relationship (especially if it's your ex who has initiated the split) you can feel overwhelmed by feelings of grief and isolation. 'People think they should "snap out of it", but you're mourning the life you may have lived together – the children, home and retirement plans – as well as the person who has left,' says Sue Hadfield. 'While it's easy to feel unlovable, it's important to treat yourself kindly. Recognising that a break-up is like a bereavement is not a form of self-pity; it helps to heal emotional wounds.'

Sue suggests telling your family and friends what has happened, to engage their support – and believes that you can consciously decide to be a survivor rather than a victim. 'Asking, "Why did this happen to me?" keeps you stuck; whereas if you acknowledge that there are always two sides in a break-up, it's easier to move on,' she says. Don't be embarrassed to ask for professional counselling if you feel you need it, and take the opportunity to rediscover old passions or explore new activities that you may not have had time for when you were with your partner. 'We invest a lot of energy into our relationships and there is an inevitable feeling of failure when they don't work out,' says Sue. 'These steps show it is possible to face your feelings and bounce back.'

BOUNCE BACK FROM... work stress

Redundancy, a difficult boss, or feeling trapped in a job you dislike can undermine your confidence and make it hard to visualise a more positive future. 'In these situations it's easy to fall into negative thinking, such as "I'll never find a new job" or "I'll lose the house now I'm not working". However, these patterns of thought won't help you to move forward or make changes,' says leading life coach Suzy Greaves, who offers a free online coaching programme for inner calm at www.thebigpeace.com. 'The common belief system of those with bounce is, "No matter what, I can handle it," so make this your daily mantra.'

Slimming World's head of nutrition and research, Dr Jacqui Lavin, suggests making time outside of work to do an exercise class or go for a walk. 'Physical activity releases stress-busting endorphins,' she says. 'It also helps you to feel more in control of your wellbeing, and that confidence can trickle into other areas of your life, like your work.' Once you're feeling more emotionally resilient, you're more able to tackle the practical issues. 'Create a realistic three-month plan of how to handle a job change and set yourself daily goals,' suggests Suzy. 'When you find yourself worrying, go back to your list of goals and take one positive action.'

Catherine Roan, managing director of career-change website CareerShifters, says a first step is to identify what you're good at, what you enjoy and what work you're interested in – you can find exercises to help you at www.careershifters.org. See if you can fix the problem without making a big change, perhaps by moving to a different team or working from home occasionally. Research new work possibilities by talking to people in the industry, then take the leap. 'Although it may not be easy, life's too short to stay in a career that makes you miserable,' says Catherine.

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BOUNCE BACK FROM... bereavement

The loss of a loved one is likely to be the worst experience we ever face – and it happens to all of us. 'While it's important to recognise the pain you are suffering, it's also important to hang on to the knowledge that "all things will pass" and that you are a strong person who will survive,' says Sue Hadfield.

It's generally accepted by psychologists that there are five stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. 'When you reach the stage of being able to accept the way things are right now, you can open up to new possibilities that didn't appear to exist before,' says Sue. For people with bounce, that often comes with a desire to create something positive out of a trauma. 'It's why people do fundraising skydives or volunteer for charities,' she explains. 'When you're going through a terrible time, helping others can show you it's not the worst thing in the world.' However, it doesn't have to be about big or dramatic gestures, says Sue: 'Small acts of kindness towards others can help you feel good and help you bounce back, too.'

BOUNCE BACK FROM... illness

'One of the problems with health setbacks – whether it's catching flu before a much-anticipated holiday or developing a more serious illness – is that you can make yourself feel worse by layering negative thinking on to the original complaint,' says Professor Paul Gilbert. Telling yourself, 'My

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holiday is ruined' or 'I won't be able to cope' loads more mental and physical stress on to your body and may make recovery more difficult. Professor Gilbert suggests surrounding yourself with people who will help you to feel better about yourself and the problems you're facing – like your Slimming World group. 'It's not about letting yourself off the hook; it's about maximising your chances of success,' he says.

Having a goal or purpose to focus on beyond the present crisis can help you to bounce back more easily, believes Sue. 'It might be raising money for charity or growing plants for your garden,' she says. 'The idea is that you have something to look forward to that gets you out of bed every morning and back into life. Setting goals is the start of you getting back into control.'



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BOUNCE BACK FROM... money worries

'Money is linked to power and self-worth, so financial problems hit people very hard,' says psychologist Corinne Sweet, author of *Stop Fighting About Money* (Help Yourself, £6.99). 'Those who bounce back tend to believe they will find a way of surviving – they have self-confidence and an ability to connect with the world. What holds others back is the idea that they have brought problems upon themselves; that somehow they're "bad people" and they don't deserve to recover from the situation.' According to Corinne, successful businesspeople don't have fewer setbacks than the rest of us, they are just able to draw a line under them, analyse what went wrong and learn from their mistakes.

If you are hit by money worries, the first step is to assess the scale of the problem. 'Take responsibility for the situation, then don't face it alone,' says Corinne. 'Talk to your partner or family, go to the Citizens Advice Bureau, speak to an independent financial adviser, or contact the Consumer Credit Counselling Service (www.cccs.co.uk). By working out exactly where you stand, and coming up with an action plan to help resolve it, you can take charge of your money worries and your emotional response to them.'

BOUNCE BACK FROM... weight gain

When we've put on weight or slipped up on a healthy eating plan, it can be easy to think we're a failure and it's not worth carrying on. There is a way to armour ourselves emotionally, to help us to avoid slipping back into old habits, though. 'Remember that your weight loss is a long-term goal,' says Dr Jacqui Lavin. 'Everyone's weight will fluctuate, and we all slip up from time to time. Going to a Slimming World group and meeting people at all stages of their weight loss journey is a great support. They won't judge you, and they will be able to offer strategies to help you tackle the causes of your weight gain.'

Sue Hadfield suggests giving yourself realistic weight-loss goals, so that slip-ups that damage your self-worth are less likely to happen. 'Give yourself a chance to succeed by avoiding situations where you are most likely to be tempted. Introducing new, healthy habits takes time and can be very difficult. It sometimes means putting your own needs first. It's not selfish; it's about self-care, and it's vital to your long-term success.'

Finally, believe in yourself. 'Part of the self-criticism that reduces your ability to bounce back is social comparison – the idea that everyone else is thinner than you, or will look down on you for any weight gain,' says Professor Gilbert. 'When you feel like that, take a few deep breaths and imagine how a compassionate friend might support you. Ultimately, emotionally resilient people have learned how to be kind to themselves.' □