



## ACOUSTIC NEUROMA ASSOCIATION

### Dealing with the New Normal Tips and Suggestions

*We offer the following tips and suggestions to assist you in transitioning with the various changes that an acoustic neuroma diagnosis can bring.*

#### How to improve your outlook:

- **Have a generally positive outlook toward life**
- **Take one day at a time**
- **Be optimistic** if unlikely by nature — to feel helpless during a crisis
- **Have a “fighting spirit”**

#### Be prepared:

- **Have enough information** about the treatment, its goals and possible side effects.
- **Find a doctor** who lets you ask all of your questions and for whom you feel mutual respect and trust. Ask what treatment options are available and the steps that you need to take. This attitude will lead you to feel more in control and less helpless and demoralized. The doctor can often walk you verbally through exactly what is going to happen step by step in advance, like rehearsal for the main event. This exercise reduces treatment fright. When you are well informed about what you are going through, you can mentally prepare yourself for each event, becoming less fearful and more self-confident about dealing with it.
- **Be prepared** if you have residual symptoms from your tumor. Do things that are practical like taking your eye drops, visiting restaurants that are quiet, bringing along your cane. If you have difficulties with memory bring your notepad.

#### Connect with others:

- **Attend an ANA support group meeting.** Feelings are often validated at these meetings. There is a genuine reaching out and concern. The best part often is the people and their unconditional caring. Technical information is often swapped at support group discussions. Many fellow patients have acquired a wealth of knowledge about their tumor and treatment options. Participants gladly share information so that others can learn from their hard earned knowledge. Having a support group can also help to decrease feelings of isolation.
- **Participate in the ANA Discussion Forum** where you will find a knowledgeable, compassionate and supportive group of AN patients who understand your situation.
- **Stay connected with ANA** on our social media pages: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.
- **Contact a Peer Mentor.** Acoustic neuroma patients and caregivers are willing to talk about their experiences and provide information, encouragement and support.

#### Empower yourself:

- **Focus on things you can do**, not what you cannot do.
- **Do something new.** Self-improvement always helps boost confidence.
- **Set goals.** Feelings of inferiority, ineffectuality and helplessness contribute to depression. To counter these feelings, set small goals and develop strategies for attaining them. Your sense of achievement will motivate you to set more goals and increase your activity. Be sure, however, that you do not set goals that are too high. Unrealistic goals set you up for failure.
- **Be flexible.** You will encounter situations where you may have to re-evaluate your needs and priorities. Things you did in the past may have to be looked at in new ways and new strategies developed to help you accomplish your tasks and manage your new responsibilities.
- **Seek resources.** Ask yourself, what people/organizations/information will be helpful to me during this time?” Be selective about the resources you need.

● **Obtain counseling** to change behaviors or ways of coping that are counterproductive. Do not be embarrassed to seek counseling with a mental health professional, particularly if it is interfering with your sleep, eating, or ability to concentrate. Few people feel ashamed to ask for help with physical ailments, many feel it is a sign of weakness to ask for help with emotional troubles. They believe they should solve their own problems. Clearly, it is not a sign of weakness nor is it an abdication of personal control. Asking for help is actually a sign of maturity and responsibility. Counseling can help you learn ways to control anger, anxiety and depression and also to develop strategies for managing stress. It can also help you to restore relationships and show other family members how to help you.

**Take care of yourself:**

● **Be kind to yourself.** Children are not the only ones who benefit from a “time out.” Give yourself permission from time to time to take a bath or read a good book.

● **Count your blessings.** One way to do this is with a gratitude journal in which you write down three to five things for which you are currently thankful from the mundane to the magnificent. Do this once a week. Keep it fresh by varying your entries as much as possible.

● **Savor life’s joys.** Pay close attention to momentary pleasures, such as experiencing nature which can often help you focus on these joys. Sometimes it is a taste of a delicious food or a mental photograph of a pleasurable moment to review in less happy times.

● **Invest time and energy in friends and family.** Avoid isolation. Plan regular activities. Where you live and your job title have really surprisingly small effects on your satisfaction with life. The biggest factor appears to be strong personal relationships.

● **Develop strategies for coping with stress and hardship.** Religious faith has been shown to help people cope but so do the secular beliefs enshrined in axioms like “This too shall pass” and “That which doesn’t kill makes me stronger.” The trick is that you have to believe them. Often people really explore their spiritual and religious beliefs. These beliefs can comfort you and may even help you find meaning in the experience of your tumor.

● **Practice acts of kindness.** Being kind to others—whether friends or strangers—triggers a cascade of positive effects. It makes you feel generous and capable and gives you a greater sense of connection with others.

● **Learn to forgive.** Let go of anger and resentment of a person who has hurt or wronged you. Inability to forgive is associated with persistent rumination or dwelling on revenge, while forgiving allows you to move on.

● **Take care of your body.** Getting plenty of sleep, exercising, stretching— all enhance your mood in the short-term. When practiced regularly, they can help make your daily life more satisfying. Physical activity is a well-known antidote for depression. Numerous studies demonstrate that individuals who begin and maintain a regular exercise program are able to considerably reduce and even eliminate their depression. It also can increase energy, provide cardiovascular conditioning and increase brain function as exercise improves circulation to the brain. Exercise can also be a great stress buster and help with the fluidity of movement.

● **Ask for help!** We all have our limitations, be aware of your strengths and abilities. When people offer to help, accept the offer.

Updated 4.19.19

By Barbara Hyatt, MSW, LCSW, Former ANA Board Member