



# Emotional Cardiac Rehab Mindset

MANAGE YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

IF IN ANY DOUBT SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE FIRST



# My story

The day of my heart attack my world came crashing down. It changed forever. 3 stents later, after being discharged from hospital I expected to be fit and healthy after a little rest. I wasn't expecting to feel so alone. I was mentally low, emotionally weak, so confused, unmotivated, anxious and frightened.

Have you been told you are now physically ready and can go home. To get on with your life ... and yet ... you still just don't feel well enough, strong enough or confident?



Whilst I was thoroughly supported through my physical recovery there was some but very little to help me with the emotional fallout.

**I am lucky!** My experience as a solution focussed therapist had given me the knowledge to understand what was happening. I want to share with you my top tips that helped me get through those roller coaster days.

## Facebook communities

I joined the [British Hearties: Worldwide Hearties Survivors Support Group](#). I'd ruptured my Achilles tendon 4 weeks before my event. So I had my leg in plaster and wasn't able to attend cardiac rehab as I was non weight bearing.

The members of this group literally saved my life. They were my life line. I was able to connect with other heart health survivors. As I began reading the posts it gave me comfort. **I wasn't alone others had been and were going through similar experiences.**



There are many groups for specific and general heart conditions on Facebook, you could join mine, [My Heart & Mind Community](#) or [HealthUnlocked](#).

The purpose is to support each other, share heart-healthy tips, discuss news and information, ask questions and share experiences.

[My Heart & Mind Facebook Community](#)

## Cardiac rehabilitation

Whilst in hospital my life style risks were assessed by the cardiac team. They gave me advice about changes I should make.

I was so overwhelmed that I didn't really take it in. I was given an information booklet. It included a plan for the first 4 weeks on my recovery at home.

Follow the guidance given, it is full of great support and ideas. If you aren't given one then request a copy.

You will be given an appointment for cardiac rehabilitation. **This is really valuable; it's a great opportunity** to meet others, learn about how to reduce your risks and to exercise your heart in a safe environment.



## It's good to talk

Talk, talk, talk and then talk some more. This advice was given to me by a friend who had also had a heart attack.

I found this was solid advice. I found it amazing how many people were happy to talk about it and how many had experienced a cardiac event themselves. Once I was getting a quote for some repairs and it just came

out in conversation. The kind gentleman I was talking to shared his story with me and made me feel calm and in control.

Pick up the phone, face to face or online **there's always someone.**

This is another reason to join a online community there are many of them.

It's empowering to be able to ask for help and advice from people that have been where you are, don't be scared to admit your fears.



## Be kind to yourself

Remember healing takes time. There is no quick fix; you don't get out of hospital and then suddenly you're back on your feet.

It's a huge shock and a trauma. One moment all is okay in your world, the next minute you are very unwell and in a serious condition.

Take it slowly inch by inch allowing yourself to take the steps necessary to recover.

**Get plenty of rest, sleep when you need,** eat healthy foods, take your medications, ask for help when you need it and do as you are advised by your medical team.

Remember things will improve; the old saying "time is a healer" is so true.



## Be in the now

Be in the present moment, in the now. The past has passed and the future has yet to happen. **The present is a gift.**

You can't change what happened in the past, and worrying about the future won't change it. Stay focused on the now, and take each day as it comes. Live in each moment as it happens.



Learn meditation or find out about mindfulness. These are practices that will help you immensely. I used meditation daily for 10 minutes and took an online mindfulness course.

The good stuff doesn't happen while you meditate it's cumulative and will make a difference to keeping you calm relaxed with a positive mindset.



# Emotional awareness

Become emotionally aware. Yes - you were physically repaired when you were sent home from hospital. Yes - you have medications to keep you well and prevent any future problems. Yes - you have been given information about how reduce your risks by making lifestyle changes as prevention.

But - it's the emotional side that can get us we least expect it. I swung from happy to be alive, to wishing I hadn't survived - it was a shock to have these thoughts. I was anxious, cried for no apparent reason and felt angry.

These feelings are normal, they will pass. Make sure you talk to friends, family and your medical team. **You are not alone, ask for help as soon as you can.** "No person is an island".



# Keep a journal

Keep a journal or a diary. It doesn't have to be very long, just enough to keep you aware of how you are improving day by day.

You can write about what you've achieved, how you are feeling, things to do or where your pain/energy/fatigue level is on a 1-10 scale.



You can capture your thoughts of the things that you want to discuss with your medical team or cardiac specialists.

You can even start a bucket list of all the things you want to do in the future.

I used a journal every evening to write a list of 5 positive things that had happened/or that I was grateful for during the day. It's often **the small stuff that we don't see** like the sun shone, a smile from a stranger or being grateful for your mobile phone.

## Friends and family

Spend time with people you love. Reach out to those that you make you happy, that support you and love you.

Remember that some people just don't know what to say. They're scared of getting in touch with you in case they say the wrong thing. Make it easy for them. You need them to understand you. You also need to understand them.

If you (or friends) have pets, spend some time stroking and caring for them. The therapeutic effect is well known. Being loved and giving [love is one of the best ways to heal yourself](#).

Don't confuse people who are always around you, with people who are always there for you. You will be pleasantly surprised at the people that become closer.



## Recovery time

Make the most of your recovery to do something that you haven't done before. How about binge watching a television series that you've wanted to watch?

Maybe start reading a book? How about doing a jigsaw puzzle. Start something creative that you've never done before? Painting or drawing?



What about photography? Taking photos whilst you are out and building up your walking? You could [listen to my podcast](#) too.

Think about what you quite fancy doing,. It doesn't have to be anything that you are good at just something that [gives you joy and pleasure](#).

I watched episodes of Chicago Fire back to back - not sure it did my heart any good with all the cliff hangers and drama!

## Find the treasure

Look for the positive in your recent experience. It was a shock, terrifying and no doubt life will never be the same.

But that doesn't mean it can't be different or even better! I know my life is greatly improved and **I am happier**.

Spend time thinking about what you have been through and your recovery. Notice any differences in your life. There will be something good that has come out of this. You may not see it right now but keep looking and I am confident there will be something.

I no longer suffer fools gladly. I make the most of each and every day. I see my heart attack as a jolt to live my life consciously. It's reminded me to make a difference and change my life. I learnt that it's experiences and people that make my life fulfilled.



## Set goals for the day

Once you are feeling stronger and feeling like you can do a little more each day. Start to set yourself goals, simple little goals. Use your journal to capture them so you know what you have in mind.



Start with **small achievable and measurable goals**. In the early days it could be as simple as just going downstairs and making yourself a cup of tea. Gradually day by day make your goals slightly bigger. The information from the cardiac rehab team is a good starting place.

As I couldn't walk for me it was spending 15 minutes to read and then action my emails. I found at first it was incredibly tiring but I felt a sense of accomplishment once I had finished. In time it built up until it was just a normal part of my day.

## Find a purpose

Look for purpose or meaning outside of yourself and your situation. Think about something that you can do to help or serve others.

Is there a charity that you could get involved with, maybe starting where you can volunteer for from home?

Is there something that you can do that helps in your local community?

Is there something that you could contribute to? Such as writing an article for your local newsletter or newspaper? Helping out a neighbour or friend. Maybe in an online community by replying to someone who is in need. **By helping others, you help them and yourself, to feel good.**

All charities will have volunteering opportunities, you can find out more by asking good old Google.



## Become a warrior of the heart

It's not just about surviving, I want to help you thrive and feel good now. To take control of your life.

I have chosen to become a warrior of the heart! I believe I'm lucky and my event is one of my life experiences that **I choose to see as a great opportunity to focus** on the things that really matter, to live & love life.



4 weeks before my heart attack I had ruptured my Achilles tendon so was put in a wheelchair. 8 weeks after the heart attack I was diagnosed with breast cancer but those are stories for another day.

I want to help you gain confidence to love the life you live. To have power over your thoughts, emotions be able to live happy after a cardiac event.