

## Living with a Disability

I found this article on my Employee Assistance Program website and find these tips to be very true. Whether you're disabled or a disability has affected a member of your family, a mental or physical disability will change your life. As with any major life change, you will face many challenges. Use the tips below to begin to come to terms with your new normal and start living your life with balance, strength and optimism.

**Don't allow yourself to be defined by your disability** – Define yourself! It's easy to fall into a state of discouragement, even despair. While it's healthy to grieve for your loss, do not allow your grief to consume you or permanently define who you are. Despite the ups and downs inherent to the bereavement process, it will be important ultimately to accept the new you.

**Make appropriate accommodations at home** – From wheelchair ramps and grab bars to screen readers on your computer and voice-activated controls, home modifications and technologies exist to make life easier. Your loved ones may also be able to help you make your home more accessible. Whenever possible, take advantage of assistive devices and optimize your living spaces. In addition to home modifications, consider your home care options. Start by checking with the Canadian Red Cross which provides personal support and homemaking services to help seniors and people recovering from an illness or injury live independently.

**Accept help but strive to become self-sufficient** – At first, you will likely need help from others. Accept help with grace, but try not to become dependent on others. What skills do you need to develop? What aspects of your life do you want back? Be creative and willing to adapt. For example, if you're wheelchair-bound and miss doing your own grocery shopping, try using the local shuttle bus and the grocery store's motorized cart, or order your groceries online and have them delivered.

**Find meaningful work** – Whether you're back on the job or getting ready to return to work, finding meaning in your contributions, either on the job or as a volunteer, can be extremely satisfying. It will also give you a sense of purpose and help you to further develop your independence. Look for ways to make work more meaningful to you. Whether it's a contribution to others, a sense of accomplishment for a job well done, or a feeling of belonging to a larger community, take the time to appreciate the intangible value that work and volunteering bring to your life.

**Take care of your mental and physical health** – According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, while mental illnesses constitute more than 15% of the burden of disease in Canada, they receive only 5.5% of health care dollars. Make mental and physical health your top priority by:

- Paying attention to how you feel
- Getting regular check-ups and preventive screenings
- Exercising
- Avoiding cigarettes and illegal substances
- Limiting alcohol consumption

- Sharing any concerns with your health-care provider

**Seek inspiration from others**

*"It is a waste of time to be angry about my disability. One has to get on with life and I haven't done badly. People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining" – Stephen Hawking*

*"I have a Disability yes that's true, but all that really means is I may have to take a slightly different path than you" – Robert. M. Hensel*

Living with a disability may not be the path you would have chosen for yourself or a loved one, yet here you are on that path. It's up to you to decide what attitude to adopt, and therefore influence where that path will take you.