

# Surviving Major Life Transitions and Thriving Beyond Them

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How many times have you been in a situation where you're thinking 'If I survive this, I'm going to ...'? That's probably a bit how you feel any time a major change happens in your life.

Transitions leave you feeling a lot like your life has been knocked off its foundation. You feel a bit rootless, very confused and frightened or sad. That's hard and incredibly uncomfortable.

The big transitions are the ones we all know: moving, with or without buying and/or selling, getting married or divorced, births and deaths, your children leaving home or moving back in, retirement and changing jobs.

Smaller transitions still confuse us, and whether your life is very structured or not at all, change can mess you up in unexpected ways. Simple things like, if your kids play sports and you pack the car for the sport whose season just ended and forget the stuff for this season, it can be embarrassing and your kids may get really cranky.

Dealing with newly recognized food allergies or a new diet for you or some member of the family can meet big resistance from the whole family. For instance, when I went vegetarian, I wasn't even living with my mother by then, but her first response to trying to make me dinner was anger, then confusion, then curiosity. A lot of people never get to curiosity, but my mother was a great cook and she took my new diet as a challenge that she met really wonderfully.

So, how does someone deal with change?

- First, freak out, at least a little.
- Second, look at the problem.
- Third, freak out again, or still.
- Forth, actually begin to figure out what problem they have on their hands and start to form, at least a short term plan.

If you've just been flooded out of your house, as an extreme example, you need

- a place to stay until the water recedes
- clean clothes
- your next meal
- to find the dog
- to call the insurance company, if you can get through
- Fifth, freak out big time, because you don't have flood insurance.

Or

- Take a breath. You will need to breathe, especially if you're cursing like a sailor.

Or

- Breathe. Always.

- If it's not a life threatening crisis, allow yourself to feel what you're feeling and begin to address whatever problems are most pressing.
- If it is a life threatening crisis, take care of business now, acknowledging that this is intense and allow yourself to really deal with the feelings when you get to safety.
- Then:
  - Assess
  - Make a plan, looking at your available resources. For instance, call the brother or good friend who lives on higher ground and see if they can take you in for a while.
    - If you have the leisure, make a detailed plan with discrete steps
    - Work on the steps one at a time to keep the tasks manageable
  - Get whatever support you'll need and don't be afraid to ask for help
  - Get started
    - Put one foot in front of the other and keep moving. Even if you do need to express the emotions you're feeling.
    - When you can, celebrate the successful steps.
  - Keep moving and adapt the plan as the unexpected and unplanned for occurs.

This basic outline works, whether you're in a burning car or you're buying your first house. The timing is just very different. To a great extent, your body doesn't really see the difference. As far as your body is concerned, it's all a crisis. How long it takes is only relevant in how you take care of yourself along the way.

#### Activities to manage stress

- I must re-emphasize the importance of breathing. Physiologically, anything other than deep, slow, abdominal breathing, signals your body that you're under stress. The best and simplest thing to do, especially when stressed, is to breathe properly. It allows you to manage your stress and think clearly. It will reduce your stress hormone levels, reducing blood pressure and giving your adrenals a break.
- Meditation is another way to regulate stress and teach you to breathe properly.
- You can use self-hypnotic techniques, including affirmations. Simply telling yourself things like "You've got this!" actually work. They reinforce your confidence and help motivate you.
- Movement is another way to regulate your breathing, work off some of the physical urge to run or freeze and free your body up. I know when I get stressed, my muscles get tighter and I need to stretch more than usual. If you need an organized activity for that, go take a Yoga class or dust off those videos.
- Listen to music and don't worry that your kids will hate the way you dance, just move! Sing along and really embarrass the kids.

- While chocolate is a wonderful thing, it is fattening, as is most comfort food. If the stress period will be short, go for it, eat that mac and cheese. If it will be long term, pay attention to what you eat, because a lot of us get upset and more stressed when our clothes stop fitting. This is actually a good time to nurture yourself by eating really well.
- Another thing that is likely to be effected by stress and eating oddly will be your bowels. Depending on your tendencies, the stress may either cause you to be constipated or have diarrhea. In either case, make sure you're eating enough fiber and drinking enough water. Pay particular attention to water intake. Too little water with diarrhea can cause major dehydration with, potentially, dire consequences. Too little water with constipation will make it so much worse.
- Find the diffuser and essential oils and try a soothing or focusing blend. Essential oils are plant hormones and they have a profound effect on our moods. Why do you think spas push the aromatherapy massage? It works to leave you even more blissed out. If you don't have a diffuser and oils, you can boil herbs and use them to scent your house.
  - In the winter, lemon balm is wonderful to lift those winter blues.
  - Citrus peel or peppermint can wake you up and help motivate you.
  - Lavender flowers, of course.
- Get a massage or acupuncture or Polarity Therapy.<sup>i</sup>
- Get out. See your friends and talk to them about what's going on and how hard it is. When my mother was taking several months to die, I only told a couple of the people in my life. When I came up for air after it was over, several of my friends were mad at me for not letting them support me. I could have really used that support but I didn't want to worry anyone. It was one of the silliest things I have ever done.
- Ask for help.

Taking care of yourself first, is always the best policy. If you're too burned out to take care of yourself, you are useless to anyone else. This is really important advice to any sort of care giver, whether it's a colicky baby, a challenging child or partner or a sick parent. You must come first. Who knows? If you start eating better and exercising now, you might just be in better shape when the trial is over than you were when it started.

To summarize

Breathe

Transitions are hard.

Breathe

Make a plan and be prepared to adjust, as needed.

Breathe, drink enough water and eat well.

Take care of yourself, getting help as needed.

Breathe

Heave a sigh of relief and celebrate, when it's over.  
And, guess what? Breathe!

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<sup>i</sup> Polarity Therapy is a wonderful combination of energetic techniques that are based on Ayurveda and Osteopathy, incorporating touch, talk, movement and eating. It can also include sound, essential oils, flower essences, crystals, spiritual contact and any other tool that the practitioner has available to them..