



Look within

Inner strength during distressing times

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

These days, we all need inner strength to deal with the issues confronting us. We need coping skills and resilience. But where do we find them?

It's closer than you think

You're the only person with the power to change you. So if you're trying to find strength from some source "out there," you're looking in the wrong direction. Instead, look within yourself.

What is inner strength?

Inner strength is the ability to handle change and challenge at work, at home, in relationships and in our world. Of course, even the strongest people can get thrown at times by life's difficulties. But when you have inner strength, you get back up, dust yourself off and keep moving forward.

An important note: Being strong is not the same as being aggressive. People who are the first to throw a punch or act in a belligerent way often feel weak inside. Their aggressive behavior is usually a cover-up for not knowing how to handle problems more constructively.

How to boost your inner strength

Building inner strength is not only possible, it's an important lifetime process. Here are some steps you can take along the way:

- **When you're feeling shaky, remind yourself of tough times you've come through.** One source of inner strength is remembering difficulties you've survived. It's not helpful to dwell on past problems. But it is useful to identify coping skills that have worked for you before so you can use them again.
- **Focus on your strengths, passion and talents.** Some people run fast, some love to cook, some sing well or find it easy to make friends. Remind yourself often of your unique strengths. Spend time doing things that are gratifying and lift your mood and confidence — not on things that frustrate you or bring you down.
- **Surround yourself with people who treat you well and have positive attitudes.** You can learn a lot about people by looking at who their friends are. Are your friends caring and supportive? Are you proud to be with them? Do they energize and inspire you? Strength can grow as a result of how others see and treat you. Spend time with people who value you.

- **Take care of yourself.** Diet, sleep and exercise are crucial to good self-care. You can't function at your best if you don't attend to your wellbeing.
- **Keep a journal of important thoughts or events.** When something goes wrong, write about what happened. Add thoughts about how you might have handled the situation differently. When something turns out well, note the strengths and skills you used to get that outcome. Then re-read your journal when you need ideas for coping or a reminder of your successes, large and small.

Spending time and energy nurturing your inner strength can lead to feeling better and making positive changes in your life.



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