

Winning Against Worries

I never thought I would have a heart transplant at age 14. After surgery, I felt awful. It was strange to have someone else's heart inside my body. Don't get me wrong — I was happy to be alive. But I worried: *What if something went wrong with this heart too?*

My parents had no idea how I felt. They were so happy that I had the transplant. But I was lonely. It was as if no one else could understand what I was going through.

The hardest part was bedtime. Lying in bed, I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. Some nights, I had bad dreams. When I couldn't sleep, I played on my computer. I came across a chat room for kids who've had transplants. Some said they felt worried and lonely too. One kid taught me a trick for falling asleep: using my imagination to help me relax.



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For a long time, I was nervous about my new heart. Even though the doctors said I was fine, any little ache or pain made me panic. I couldn't stop worrying. I talked to a therapist who said it's common for kids with a serious illness to get caught up in a “worry spiral.” First, something small happens and I start to worry. Then, as I keep thinking about it, I worry even more. Soon, it spirals out of control!

I learned how to stay calm and talk myself down the spiral. Now, I tell myself things like: *It was just a dream.* Or: *I'm healthy now; my heart is working just fine.* When I notice worries start to build up, I talk myself down right away.

Last night, when playing soccer, I felt my heart pounding in my chest. My first thought was: *Oh no!* But then I said to myself: *It's OK, my heart is supposed to beat fast when I exercise. Nothing is wrong!* I knew I was going to be OK.

Sit back and relax.
Picture yourself
in your favorite
place and answer
these questions.



Where are you? What do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell?

All the people you trust are there with you. Who is there?

You feel really relaxed and happy! What are you doing?



WORRIED

Worries can spiral out of control really fast!
What do you worry about? Write it down in the red boxes below.

A diagram illustrating the transition from worry to calm. On the left, a vertical spiral of red thought bubbles starts with a red oval containing the text "What if...?". Below it are two empty red ovals. On the right, a vertical spiral of blue thought bubbles starts with a blue oval containing the text "Am I crazy?". Below it are two empty blue ovals. In the center, a red spiral line descends from the top, crossing the middle, and then continues as a blue spiral line that ends at the bottom. The word "CALM" is written in large blue letters at the bottom center.

CALM

Talk yourself down to stay cool and calm.
What can you say to yourself to relax? Write it down in the blue boxes above.