



The Spirit

The BOUNCE—

*Do you LEAN INTO THE CURVEBALLS IN
LIFE OR RUN FOR COVER WHEN
THEY START FLYING? BUILDING
RESILIENCE CAN HELP YOU FACE WHATEVER
COMES YOUR WAY WITH GRACE.*

by Megan McMorris

Mind the gap: Life doesn't always let you leap over adversity, but your belief in your ability to survive—and thrive—helps you get back on track, even if it's a different track than you imagined.



—BACK FACTOR

It was the perfect storm. “Everything that was part of my identity was taken away from me at once,” recalls Eva Selhub, MD, a Waltham, Massachusetts-based life coach and author of *Resilience for Dummies*. In the 1990s, she faced a medical emergency, her dog and grandfather died, her dad had a heart attack and she was a victim of harassment—all in one five-month period.

“I ended up in this spiritual crisis of, ‘Why me, why me?’ and was in a dark place for a while,” she recalls. And then one day—after a period of grieving—she had a mindset morph. “I realized that instead of saying, ‘Why me?’ when something

bad happens, say ‘Why *not* me?’” she says. “It was like something woke up inside me that made me realize that life doesn’t happen to me, it happens with me.”

Selhub’s ability to flip her mental script has a name:

YOUR SENSE OF “I CAN
HANDLE THIS” REFLECTS
YOUR SELF-EFFICACY.

resiliency. The ability to bounce back from adversity, resiliency is associated with lower levels of depression, stress and anxiety, as well as increased longevity.

“Resiliency is about thriving versus diving when adversity happens to you,” says Selhub. “And it’s knowing that adversity will *always* happen. It’s a matter of how we’re going to handle it when it does. It’s the ability to bounce back despite adversity, like a tree branch bending under the weight of snow, and then when the snow falls off, the branch goes right back to its original position. Even if you bend at first, you bounce back better to what you were before.”

Maybe She’s Born With It

We all have that pal who, no matter what happens to them, seems to just naturally take things in stride that would blindside everyone else. It makes you wonder, is there a resiliency gene? Yes, and we all have it, says Selhub. Resiliency, in fact, is a part of being human. “We’re all innately wired to be able to handle adversity,” she says.

“Our bodies are wired to handle it, and our brains are wired to compartmentalize things so we can live through traumas.”

It’s just that some of us forget about it when we go through challenges, says Selhub. Just as sometimes you forget a talent that you’ve buried, you can also forget your natural resilience. “Some people have what we called a ‘learned hopelessness,’” she says. “It’s not that they’re not born resilient, but over a period of time of having bad experiences, they become more victimized.”

Others are also just naturally born with a more go-with-the-flow personality, says clinical psychologist Jenny Yip, PsyD,

**“HOW WELL
PHYSICALLY CAN YOU
HANDLE ADVERSITY?”
—EVA SELHUB, MD**

executive director of the Renewed Freedom Center in Los Angeles. “Some kids are born with a temperament that will help them

be more resilient throughout life,” says Yip. “On the other hand, there are other kids who are more anxious or risk-avoidant and they’ll have fewer qualities to help them be resilient.”

There’s also the “nurture” part of the nature-versus-nurture spectrum to consider, she adds. “Resiliency doesn’t just come from your temperament,” says Yip. “Your environment must support it. Which means parents must give their children opportunities to think outside the box and sometimes let them navigate challenges on their own.” That gives children the opportunity to fail—and learn that it’s possible to recover—and sets the stage for more resiliency as adults.

Social support is one of the factors that help determine how resilient we are in the face of challenges.



How to Get Your Bounce Back

If your resiliency stores feel like a tennis ball that's gone flat—especially after the past two years—there are ways to get it back.

★ **Prep Yourself Physically** We tend to equate wellness with certain numbers—like blood pressure and cholesterol—but it's time to take a more holistic look at your health, says Selhub, who explains that being physically well can help your body manage—and recover from—stress. Are you exercising regularly to improve your strength and fitness? “Ask yourself, ‘Am I fueling my body to thrive? Am I getting sufficient sleep? How do I feel?’” she says. These lifestyle habits lay the foundation for good mental health as well.

★ **Flip the Script** *The Little Engine That Could* is more than a cute children's book, says Yip, with a laugh. “It's a great lesson in resiliency.” Simply thinking that you can do something—or get through a situation—versus approaching it with a self-defeating attitude can make all the difference in the end. “If you approach challenges with a curious mind, it will facilitate more of a receptive opportunity to experiment,” she says. “We call that mental flexibility, that ability to shift from thinking, ‘I can't do that’ to ‘It's possible’. It's the ability to look at multiple solutions and not be stuck in a problem. And if you don't try at all, then you definitely can't.”

★ **Challenge Yourself** Just as you have to flex your physical muscles, you also need to give yourself mental challenges in order to build resilience. “If you've never dealt with a challenge, you won't know how to deal with one when it does come along,” Yip says. Those challenges, she adds, can come in many different forms. “It can be challenging yourself to run

a marathon, or to build a piece of furniture, or it can be talking to that co-worker or boss about a difficult subject. Whatever it is that's keeping you from thriving, challenge yourself and come up with ways where you can test the waters.” That creates self-efficacy, your belief in your own capabilities.

★ **Laugh It Off** We all have those moments when we're living the lyrics of Alanis Morissette's song *Ironie*. But being able to see the irony while it's happening, rather than getting caught up in the nitty-gritty is all a part of the bigger resiliency picture. That doesn't mean you're just brushing things off and covering them up with a smile, either. Instead, you're taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture, says Yip. “This increases your mental flexibility too,” she says.

★ **Find Your Own God** Whatever spirituality means to you, finding an inner source of peace can help you weather challenges that come your way. “For me, the notion of spirituality is the profound belief that you belong to something much greater,” says Selhub. “People who have a greater spiritual connection are more resilient, optimistic and healthier. They find meaning in what's happening and are able not to avoid feeling victimized by circumstances.”

★ **Be Self-Aware** We all get caught up in negative thought patterns—even downright spirals at times—but the difference lies in recognizing those patterns in order to change them. “You have to learn how to become aware of your emotions and learn to work through those emotions to find your balance,” says Selhub. “You can become more aware of your negative thoughts and learn how to shift that mindset and clear negative thinking.” This is all part of developing emotional intelligence.

The Difference Between Resilience and Denial

While resilience means the ability to bounce back from adversity, it's also important to recognize what it's not: denial. You're not encountering something difficult, challenging or unpleasant—like a job loss, death or betrayal—and ignoring or denying it. Resilience isn't a free pass to skip the necessary grieving process. “If you immediately bounce back, you're just ignoring the problem and what's going on internally,” says resiliency expert Eva Selhub, MD. “It's important that we acknowledge how painful or sad a situation might be and then use it as an opportunity for growth and learning.”

Remember that the next time someone tells you to “get over it” when you know you're just going through a necessary process. “There is no right timing. People who say ‘get over it’ are likely not working through issues themselves,” says Selhub. “And it's not just about ‘getting over’ something; you may *never* get over it.” Some events are too traumatic to put in the rearview mirror, but you keep going. “The pain might still be there,” she says. “But the difference is that you're not victimized by the circumstance.”