SCARSTORIES · A LITTLE COMPANY ON THE WAY

The wait is the hardest part — and why that's normal

Waiting for answers is its own kind of work — most people find it harder than the news itself. That isn't weakness. It's how the human mind handles uncertainty.

Preparing and waiting

> Educational content.

The wait is the stretch of time between a test and its answer, or between a decision and a date — and for most people it is genuinely the hardest part of the whole journey. Not because you're weak, but because the mind is built to solve problems, and waiting gives it nothing to solve.

Why the wait hurts more than the news

Bad news is a fact. However painful, it sits still, and the mind can begin working around it. A wait is an unanswered question, and the mind hates unanswered questions. It circles them at 3am. It invents answers, and it usually picks the worst ones. Most people who have sat where you are say the same thing: the imagining was harder than the reality — whatever the reality turned out to be.

This pattern is so common it has a name — anticipatory anxiety — and most of us know its shape: racing thoughts, a tight chest, poor sleep, a short temper with the people we love most. Please hear this clearly: feeling this way doesn't mean something is wrong with you, and it doesn't mean your heart is getting worse. It means you are a person under an unusual kind of strain.

What actually helps (small things, done daily)

- Keep ordinary life going. Eat, shower, go to work if you can, take the walk you usually take. Routine is an anchor — most people feel steadier on a normal day than on an empty one.
- Take the wait in slices. Today, not "until the result". Most people find that an hour at a time is bearable in a way that a whole week is not.

- Write the questions down. Every worry that arrives goes onto paper or into a note on your phone. It stops the loop of "I must not forget to ask".
- Limit the searching. One question, one trusted source, then close the browser. The internet has no idea what your particular result means.
- Let one person carry some of it. Say the sentence out loud — "I'm scared of this" — to someone who loves you. It halves the weight, most of the time.

What to ask your team

- When will I know, roughly — days, or weeks?
- Who do I call if I haven't heard by then?
- What happens after the result — what's the next step?
- Is there one person I can ask questions of, and when is the best time to reach them?

> **Take it to your team**
>
> Waiting well is a team skill. Ask them to be concrete about timelines — "days to weeks", not "soon" — give you a named contact, and tell you what happens next at each step. Concrete plans are the strongest medicine for a waiting mind.

> For three weeks before my result I rehearsed the worst-case conversation every night. The real one took ten minutes — and it wasn't the worst case. I'd like those weeks back.

> **Call for help if**
>
> The wait doesn't pause your symptoms. Call your team — or emergency services if it's sudden or severe — if you get new or worsening chest pain or pressure, breathlessness at rest, a faint or collapse, or a racing heart that won't settle. This is not "bothering anyone". This is exactly what they're there for.

A last word

You are not doing the wait wrong. There is no wrong way to feel about it. And when the answer comes — whatever it is — the decisions that follow belong to your own team, made with you, at your pace. Your only job between now and then is to get through the days, one at a time.

Questions to take to my team

- [ ] When will I know, roughly — days, or weeks?

- [ ] Who do I call if I haven't heard by then?

- [ ] What happens after the result — what's the next step?

- [ ] Is there one person I can ask questions of, and when is the best time to reach them?

For discussion and personal reference. Your care team’s individual instructions take priority. For an emergency, contact your local emergency service; do not wait for a community reply.