



HARNESS YOUR POWER: FIVE WAYS TO ADVOCATE FOR HEALTH

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Foreword

My first clue that my body wasn't functioning normally came during graduate school. I struggled to lift myself and turn in bed, and fatigue consumed me. At the time, I dismissed it. I told myself it was just the rigorous demands of school. But deep down, I knew something wasn't right.

Years later, as an intern, I could finally afford medical attention. By then, muscle cramps—known as dystonia—made walking nearly impossible. What followed was a long, difficult journey to a diagnosis, during which I saw countless specialists and endured tests, including an unnecessary leg biopsy.

This experience taught me how important it is to take control of your health. Through self-advocacy, I created a plan that not only helped me get a diagnosis but also transformed my life. I went from almost needing a wheelchair to running a 5K.

In this journal, I'll share the five ways I learned to advocate for my health, along with practical tools to help you **Harness Your Power**. You'll explore your strengths, set goals, and create a roadmap for self-care and advocacy in all areas of life.

Introduction

Welcome to *Harness Your Power: The Journal!*

Hi there!

We know it can feel overwhelming to advocate for yourself or practice self-care, but with the right tools, you can make a difference in your life. This journal was designed to help you:

- Explore your strengths.
- Identify your advocacy and self-care goals.
- Create a plan to achieve them.

Self-advocacy isn't just about healthcare—it's about improving your overall quality of life. Through a series of guided activities and reflections, you'll gain clarity, develop confidence, and learn how to stand up for yourself in any area of life.

About Me

I am a wife, mom, author, Parkinson's survivor, life coach, and motivational speaker. I retired to focus on wellness and work-life balance. At one point, I almost had to use a wheelchair permanently. Today, I'm running 5Ks and enjoying a more active, balanced life.

I hope what I've learned on this journey will bless and inspire you to take control of your life and **Harness Your Power**.

So, let's get started!

With love, **Tyaisha Blount-Dillon**

Chapter 1: Find a Primary Care Physician You Trust

Finding a trusted primary care physician (PCP) is the cornerstone of advocating for your health. Your PCP acts as your partner, helping you navigate the healthcare system and connecting you to specialists when needed.

When I began my journey, I struggled to find answers. I saw specialists who suggested unnecessary surgeries and treatments. It wasn't until I found the right PCP that I felt supported and guided toward an accurate diagnosis.

Here's how to find the right PCP for you:

1. **Do your research.** Look for physicians who have experience with your symptoms or condition.
2. **Ask the right questions:**
 1. Have they treated patients with similar symptoms?
 2. Are they willing to collaborate with specialists?
 3. Do they stay updated on medical innovations?
3. **Trust your instincts.** A good doctor listens, respects your input, and works with you as a team.

Activity: Daily Health Checklist

Use the following checklist to evaluate how well you're taking care of your health on a daily basis. Reflect on areas where you might need additional support from your PCP or specialists.



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Daily Checklist

YES / NO: Did I get 8 hours of sleep? YES / NO: Did I drink enough water? YES / NO: Did I take a walk today? YES / NO: Did I read a book or meditate? YES / NO: Did I socialize with friends or family?

Chapter 2: Become a Partner in Your Healthcare

Healthcare isn't just about receiving care—it's about being an active participant. One way to do this is by joining patient advisory committees or boards. These groups allow you to advocate for your needs while improving care for others.

For example, I served on Emory's Parkinson's Patient Advisory Board, where we worked on projects like smartwatch research to improve patient activity. I also joined the Parkinson's Foundation Georgia Advisory Board, advocating for my African American community and helping shape programs that meet patients' unique needs.

Take action: Find opportunities to partner with your healthcare system, whether it's joining a board, attending health forums, or volunteering. Your voice matters!

Activity: Set and Prioritize Goals

Use this activity to identify how you can get more involved in your healthcare system or community.

Date: ____

- **Goal 1:** _____
- **Goal 2:** _____
- **Goal 3:** _____

Chapter 3: Be Proactive

When it comes to your health, being proactive can make all the difference. After years of living with symptoms, I decided to take matters into my own hands.

Here's how I did it:

1. **Research your symptoms.** Educate yourself about possible conditions and treatments.
2. **Create a wellness plan.** I focused on nutrition and exercise, incorporating leafy greens, juicing, and strength training.
3. **Track your progress.** Consistently monitoring my symptoms and lifestyle changes helped me see improvement.

By the time I was diagnosed in 2013, my proactive efforts had already improved my quality of life.

Activity: The Wheel of Life

Use this tool to identify areas of your life that need more balance. Rate each category from 1-10.

- **Health:** __
- **Physical Environment:** __
- **Recreation:** __
- **Spirituality:** __
- **Social Life:** __
- **Creativity:** __
- **Personal Growth:** __

Reflect: Which areas need the most attention?

Chapter 4: Find Your Voice

Advocating for your health requires confidence and preparation. Here's how to make the most of your doctor's appointments:

- **Come prepared.** Write down your symptoms, questions, and concerns.
- **Be specific.** Describe when and how your symptoms occur.
- **Share your family history.** Even limited information can help your doctor piece together the puzzle.

When I started speaking up in my appointments, I noticed a dramatic difference in my care. Remember: you are your own best advocate.

Activity: SWOT Analysis

Use this analysis to understand your strengths and challenges as you advocate for your health.

Strengths: ____ **Weaknesses:** ____ **Opportunities:** _____ **Threats:** ____

Chapter 5: Seek Support

Surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people is crucial for your journey. I found support in unexpected places—like my workout group and church community.

Here are some other ways to build your support system:

- **Join a support group.** Look for groups that align with your needs, like Parkinson's organizations or local health communities.
- **Work with a professional.** A mental health provider or life coach can help you stay motivated and focused.
- **Connect with a caseworker.** Many insurance companies offer nurses or caseworkers who can guide your healthcare decisions.

Daily Reflection

At the end of each day, reflect on your progress using these prompts:

Today I am feeling... __

My happy memories about today are... __

Today I'm grateful for... __

Conclusion

Advocating for your health is about reclaiming your power, even in the face of uncertainty. By finding trusted medical professionals, partnering with the healthcare system, being proactive, speaking up, and seeking support, you can take control of your journey and improve your quality of life.

Remember, your health is your greatest asset. Harness your power, and don't stop fighting for the care you deserve.

With hope and encouragement, Tyaisha Blount-Dillon

