



## Health: How Are You?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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I am often surprised by how many people avoid being around others because they don't know how to answer the question "How Are You?" Some people who have been ill or on a medical leave really don't know how to respond to the question. They think that the other person might be judgmental, especially if they say that they have been suffering from depression, anxiety or another mental illness. Other people think that it is none of the other person's business and want to keep things private.

Following are some ideas about the question "How are you?":

1. This is likely just a greeting - When I was in England, a young man greeted me as I came out of the bathroom. He said, "Are you alright?" I immediately thought that something was wrong with my appearance or that he thought I was in trouble. The boy's father saw my confusion and explained that his son meant "Hi". In Canada "How are you?" often is just a way to greet another person.
2. Others don't really care - Most people are so wrapped up in their own life that they aren't really interested in your answer to this question. Sometimes they aren't even listening!
3. Use honesty - Don't lie or used automatic "canned" answers like "Great" or "Fine" unless that is really true.
4. Develop short, practiced responses - When I am consulting with media, I usually prepare one-liners that capture the message that I want to communicate. I teach clients to do the same thing regarding their health. For example, you might state "Not as good as I am going to be but better than I was". When others hear this, they usually accept it and move on to another topic.
5. Create a scale that professionals understand - Write the numbers "0" to "10" in a vertical line down the left-hand side of a paper. Then write a description of what your health would be like at each number with "0" being the worst situation and "10" being the best. Share the list with your physician, insurance worker or other professional. It will then be much easier to communicate with that person in the future by using a number rather than just words to describe how you are feeling.
6. Divert to another topic - One sentence can change everything. Perhaps you could say "Let's talk about your children" or "Enough about me. How are you doing?" Asking a good open question that doesn't have a "yes" or "no" answer can move the focus dramatically. (And remember, people tend to like to talk about themselves and their interests, so you just need to get them started).
7. Practice enjoying life - If you are avoiding people or activities because you are afraid that someone will ask you about your health, then you are the one who is missing out! Practice the above and then head out determined to see how these techniques work like magic. You will feel better just knowing that you have conquered one more barrier to healthy living.