

## SOMETIMES LIFE JUST GETS HEAVY

### *Why Healing the Mind Matters as Much as Healing the Body*

M. Scott Peck wrote it best. *"Life is difficult."* The older I get (and the longer I practice workers' compensation law), the more I realize how accurate it is. Every year, when May rolls around, and we talk about Mental Health Awareness Month, I think about how changes like an injury can weigh a person down.

Recently, I had one of those weeks that reminded me just how much change people can go through at once. One of our longtime coworkers had her last day at the office, which was tough for all of us. Around the same time, my oldest son decided he was moving to Seattle. He's lived here his whole life, so that's a big shift for our family. And to top it off, our neighbors across the street, folks we've grown close to over the years, moved away too. Their kids call my wife and me Mimi and Pop Pop, so seeing that house empty now feels strange.

None of those things is a tragedy. They're just part of life. But even ordinary changes can bring a certain stress. Starting a new job, retiring, moving, losing someone you love, or even just watching the world feel a little uncertain ... those things add up. Sometimes we carry that stress without even realizing how much it's affecting us.

I see this all the time with the people I represent after a work injury. Most people understandably focus on the physical side of things first. The broken bone, the back strain, the surgery, the therapy. But what often catches people off guard is the emotional stress.

When you're younger, you tend to bounce back quickly. At 18, you might get hurt, rest for a bit, and then move on. But as we get older, things don't always work that way. Suddenly, someone who has always been active and

independent starts wondering, "Is this going to be something I have to deal with for the rest of my life?" That realization can be unsettling.

Stress, anxiety, and depression can have a real impact on the body. They can make pain feel worse, interfere with sleep, drain your motivation for therapy, and even slow the healing process. I've seen that happen with many clients over the years. Fortunately, you don't have to face those struggles alone. In many workers' compensation cases, counseling and mental health care can be part of the recovery process.

But reaching out for help can feel uncomfortable. Many people hesitate to admit they're struggling, even to their own doctors. That's why community matters so much. I've had clients who found real comfort in support groups with people going through similar conditions. When someone hears another person say, "I've dealt with that too," it can make a world of difference. Sometimes the biggest relief is simply realizing you're not the only one going through something.

So during Mental Health Awareness Month, I think it's a good time for all of us to remember two things. First, if you're struggling, whether it's because of an injury, a life change, or something that's weighing on you, it's okay to seek support. Second, we can all try to show a little more grace to the people around us.

Everyone's carrying something, even if we can't see it. And a little patience and understanding can go a long way.



*- Jim Monast*

# COST-SAVVY CLEAN

## CHEAP AND CLEVER SPRINGTIME HOME HACKS

Whether you greet spring-cleaning with sheer delight or utter dread, it doesn't need to be expensive or complicated.

While supermarket shelves are stocked with pricey products that will clean out your wallet as much as your clutter, there are simpler, less costly ways to make your home sparkle for the season. Here are a few surprising household cleaning hacks that will beautify your living space while being kind to your budget.

### GIVE YOUR SCRAPS A SECOND CHANCE.

It's often shocking how much we throw away without giving these items a helpful new purpose. You know all those used dryer sheets you toss away without a second thought? In addition to having a fresh scent, these frequently discarded pieces of cloth can work well as makeshift dusters for everything from your TV to your blinds.

Speaking of blinds, don't rush to throw out your next pair of worn-out socks. When dampened and slipped over your hands, they can remove dust and dirt from your slats as pristinely as most store-bought cleaners.

### ELIMINATE EVERYDAY ANNOYANCES.

Now, let's focus on two of the most frustrating cleaning chores imaginable: getting the mounds of dust and dirt off a ceiling fan and ridding your windows of those annoying streaks left by paper towels.

For the first obstacle, you can find an unlikely solution in your bedroom. If you have a spent pillowcase that's ready for the trash, use it instead to capture the crud on your fan! Put it over each blade and slowly wipe down the surface. The cloth will catch the dirt, and the space in the pillowcase will trap it, preventing it from spilling



onto your floor. As for those streaked windows, life can be made simpler if you're a coffee drinker. Why? Because unused filters are super-absorbent and can remove those lingering lines in a flash.

With a bit of resourcefulness and creativity, your spring-cleaning routine can keep your home blissful without breaking the bank.

## Back to Work (the Right Way)

### HOW TO STAY SAFE AND PROTECT YOUR CLAIM WHEN OFFERED LIGHT-DUTY WORK

Returning to work after an injury isn't always an all-or-nothing situation. In many cases, an employee may be cleared to perform certain tasks while still recovering. That's where **light-duty work** often comes into play.

Light-duty assignments are designed to allow injured workers to return to the workplace in a limited capacity while following their doctor's medical restrictions. Instead of jumping straight back into your role, you may be asked to handle tasks that place less strain on your body. This could include administrative work, reduced hours, or roles that avoid heavy lifting, repetitive motion, or long periods of standing.

Employers are not legally required to create these modified roles. However, when a company offers a suitable position that respects your medical limitations, it can play a role in how your workers' compensation benefits are handled.

#### LIGHT-DUTY WORK CAN AFFECT YOUR BENEFITS.

When receiving workers' compensation for lost wages, the amount you earn after returning to work can change those benefits. If the light-duty position pays roughly the same amount as your regular job, wage replacement payments may stop because you are no longer losing income. Meanwhile, if the modified role pays less than your previous position, you

may continue receiving partial wage benefits to help make up some of the difference. Every case is unique, which is why it's important to understand exactly how your situation may be affected.

#### DO YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT A LIGHT-DUTY ASSIGNMENT?

If your employer offers a position that genuinely follows your doctor's restrictions, declining it without a valid reason could impact your claim. However, you may have good reason to refuse the assignment if the duties go beyond your medical limitations or if performing the work could worsen your condition. Your health and recovery should always come first.

#### PROTECT YOURSELF DURING THE PROCESS.

If you're offered a modified position, take time to review the details carefully. Make sure the responsibilities match the restrictions your doctor has provided. If something seems unclear, talk with your doctor and ask for written guidance about what activities are safe for you.

And if you're ever unsure about your rights or how an offer may affect your benefits, working with an experienced workers' compensation attorney can help you make informed decisions while protecting your recovery. Our team at Monast Law Office is here to guide you through your recovery journey.

# TINY SURVIVOR, BIG HEART

## HOW ONE FAMILY GAVE BABY SPARROW A FUTURE

At times, a single life can become a light in the midst of darkness. Baby Sparrow's story is one of courage, compassion, and unwavering love. Rescued from a war zone in Afghanistan after losing both her parents, the little girl arrived with serious injuries, her future uncertain. When those around her suggested ending her life rather than providing care, the bravery of the soldiers on the ground changed everything. They brought her to safety, giving her a chance to heal and a chance at life.

It was there, in the American field hospital, that Joshua and Stephanie Mast first learned about her. Already parents themselves, they didn't hesitate. Recognizing her urgent need for love, stability, and medical care, they petitioned to bring her into their family. Their decision wasn't made lightly; it was made with the heart of parents willing to give a child the future she deserved.

The path wasn't easy. Challenges and claims from others threatened to separate Baby Sparrow from the only stable home she'd known. But Joshua and Stephanie never wavered.

They fought out of commitment to a child who had survived unimaginable circumstances and whose only wish was to be safe, cared for, and loved.



In February 2026, hope became reality. The Supreme Court of Virginia upheld the Mast family's adoption, securing Baby Sparrow's place in a loving home. Her journey from danger to a life of safety reminds us all of the impact one family can have and how courage, persistence, and compassion can triumph over the odds.

Today, Baby Sparrow's laughter echoes in a home filled with love. Her story is a powerful reminder that even amid chaos, human kindness can create miracles. For Joshua and Stephanie, every smile, every milestone, and every moment with her is a testament to the extraordinary power of love and the resilience of the human spirit.

From war-torn beginnings to a future full of possibilities here in America, Baby Sparrow's life is proof that even in the darkest circumstances, hope can prevail and one caring family can change everything.

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ANSWER



## EATS WITH ELLIE NO-BAKE LEMON ECLAIR CAKE

*This light, easy-to-make lemon pudding cake delivers all the refreshing flavors of summer.*

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 box graham crackers, crushed
- 2 (3.4-oz) boxes instant lemon pudding
- 3 1/2 cups milk
- 1 (8-oz) container frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- Zest of 1 lemon

### DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the instant lemon pudding mix and milk.
2. Let the mixture sit for 5 minutes to thicken.
3. Fold in the thawed whipped topping until smooth.
4. In a separate bowl, mix together the powdered sugar, vanilla extract, lemon juice, and zest.
5. Add the lemon mixture to the pudding mixture, stirring until combined.
6. Layer graham crackers on the bottom of a 9x13-inch dish.
7. Spread half the lemon pudding mixture over the graham crackers.
8. Repeat steps with another layer of graham crackers and the remaining pudding mixture.
9. Chill the cake in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours before serving.

Inspired by DelectableRecipe.com



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# LONG LIVE THE MEOW-NARCHY

## WHY YOUR CAT'S ATTITUDE IS 100% HISTORICALLY ACCURATE

Long before cats ruled the internet, they ruled ... well, everything. If your cat struts around the house like royalty today, history says they may actually be correct.

Ancient Egypt was the epicenter of feline fame, where cats were treated more like valued family members rather than pets. While most of us argue about buying premium cat food, wealthy Egyptians accessorized their cats with fancy jewelry. The shinier the collar, the higher the status. Somewhere, a modern house cat just read that and feels deeply underappreciated.

Their admiration wasn't just for show. Cats were fierce little protectors, guarding homes from snakes, rats, and scorpions that could be lethal, especially to young children. In a world without pest control companies, cats were the ultimate security system. So, naturally, Egyptians treated them like whiskered heroes.

Their devotion even reached the battlefield. In one famous moment in history, Persian forces released cats onto the battlefield during a major conflict. Faced with the horrifying possibility of accidentally harming the sacred animals, Egyptian soldiers chose surrender over risking feline injury. Imagine explaining that loss in a post-battle meeting: "We could have won, but ... cats."

The love didn't stop when a cat passed away. Families mourned, holding funeral ceremonies and, in some traditions, shaving their eyebrows as a sign of grief. When the eyebrows grew back, the mourning period was considered complete.

Egyptians also held massive celebrations in honor of their beloved feline goddess Bastet. People traveled from all over to gather, sing, dance, and celebrate their favorite animal. If your cat has ever knocked something off the

table while you were hosting guests, just know they're continuing a long tradition of being the center of the party.

Egypt wasn't alone in its admiration of cats. In China, a cat deity named Li Shou was believed to protect crops from mice and rats. According to legend, Li Shou was offered the responsibility of managing the world but preferred napping instead. Frankly, that tracks. Meanwhile, in ancient Poland, Ovinnik, a black cat spirit, guarded homes and barns.

Even after ancient empires faded, the admiration stuck. Across cultures and centuries, cats have remained symbols of comfort, protection, and companionship. So, the next time your cat ignores you, knocks over a glass, and then demands dinner, remember: They come from a long line of beings who were literally worshipped, but in their minds, they haven't changed at all; we have.