

eHouseCall

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A Monthly Electronic Newsletter from HealthLink

Doctor's Bag



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PATIENTS AS PARTNERS

Health care can be delivered most effectively when patients are active partners in the treatment plan. This is especially true when it comes to managing chronic disease.

Your personal physician can diagnose a condition and prescribe appropriate treatment but when you walk out the office door, follow-through and a successful outcome are ultimately in your hands.

Self-management of chronic disease can make the difference between a full, meaningful life and partial or total disability. It seems like an obvious choice but many individuals find lifestyle changes too difficult to achieve on their own. External support, advice and encouragement are necessary resources for many chronic disease patients.

So where to begin? Start out by asking your physician for referrals to professionals who are experienced in supporting chronic disease self-management. Check with your employer or health benefit plan administrator. Many companies include condition management programs in their health coverage. Typically, these programs are voluntary and free to enrollees and their covered dependents. Last but not least, let your family and friends know how vital self-management is to your quality of life and ask them for their commitment to your success.

HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

MARCH

MANAGING CHRONIC ILLNESS

Many chronic conditions that were considered fatal in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are treatable today, resulting in longer lives for many Americans. However, this increased longevity coupled with the need for long-term treatment of chronic disease puts a strain on the health care system in a number of ways – among them, demand for resources and increasing health care costs. Self-management of chronic illness is an important first step toward living a longer, healthier life.

Play an active role in your treatment plan.

If you are living with chronic disease, your personal physician is your first and best resource for managing the condition.

However, most of the care a person needs to successfully manage a chronic condition must come directly from the patient. Self-monitoring and personal decision-making regarding lifestyle changes have been shown to improve health outcomes while significantly decreasing hospital and emergency room visits.

Be a good health care consumer.

Advances in diagnostic procedures, treatments and an increasing awareness of health and fitness are good news for consumers. Taking advantage of early diagnosis and preventive care measures, and heeding the advice of your personal physician are all valuable ways to improve quality of life and lower out-of-pocket medical costs.

Be a good patient.

Follow your doctor's orders. If you are obese and your doctor tells you to lose weight, work with him to start a diet and exercise plan – and stick with it. If you have diabetes and your doctor advises you to modify your diet, take her advice – and stay on track. If you have asthma and your doctor suggests avoiding asthma triggers, make sure you know what they are and stay clear. If you have heart disease and your doctor prescribes medications, fill the prescriptions and take them as directed. These are just a few examples of how to be a good patient. Bottom line: adopting healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods, being physically active, and avoiding tobacco use can help you control the effects of chronic disease.



DidUKnow?

The following information is from the World Health Organization "Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health – Facts Related to Chronic Disease" 2007:

- Chronic diseases are now the major cause of death and disability worldwide. Noncommunicable conditions, including cardiovascular diseases (CVD), diabetes, obesity, cancer and respiratory diseases, now account for 59% of the 57 million deaths annually and 46% of the global burden of disease.
- A relatively few risk factors – high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, smoking and alcohol – cause the majority of the chronic disease burden.
- **A change in dietary habits, physical activity and tobacco control, have a major impact in reducing the rates of these chronic diseases, often in a relatively short time.**
- Heart attacks and strokes kill about 12 million people every year; another 3.9 million die from hypertensive and other heart conditions.
- More than one billion adults worldwide are overweight; at least 300 million of them are clinically obese.
- About 75% of CVD can be attributed to the majority risks: high cholesterol, high blood pressure, low fruit and vegetable intake, inactive lifestyle and tobacco.

Newsletter Information Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "Chronic Disease Overview," 2005; California HealthCare Foundation, "Patient Self-Management" (www.chcf.org); World Health Organization "Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health – Facts Related to Chronic Disease" 2007

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