

Self-Care Strategies: Your Healthcare Team

Living with a long-term health problem is not easy. The day to day management, along with the ongoing long-term challenges can be overwhelming. But as an active self-care manager you can take control and continue to guide your life in the direction you want it to go. The best place to begin is with your healthcare team.

When you have a chronic, or long-term condition, your healthcare provider may grow from one to become a team. You will no longer just see your main healthcare provider, which could be a general practitioner or internist, but you will also begin to visit specialists that can help you manage the different aspects of your disease.

For example, if you have diabetes, you may see your primary healthcare provider, a diabetes educator, a dietitian, an exercise specialist and an endocrinologist.

If you have heart disease you may add a cardiologist, and cardiac rehabilitation specialist to your team.

Together they will work to develop a treatment plan that can help you feel better day to day, and help prevent your condition from getting worse.

Having more than one care provider and multiple appointments can get overwhelming. It may be helpful to remember that your care team includes you. You are the most important member of your healthcare team and the one with the power to make your treatment plan a success.

Take an active role in your treatment plan and work with your healthcare providers to ensure it works best for you.

Communication is key. Make sure that all members of your healthcare team communicate with each other and send all of their reports to your primary care provider, so she has a complete picture of your overall health and can get you the treatment you need.

And as the most important member of your team, make sure you take the time to communicate as well. Talk to your healthcare providers about what you can do to take control of your condition. Be honest about what you can and cannot do.

Ask questions.

"I call my cardiologist and um he told me to stop for ten days and restart, so it's been better." – Judy, patient

"Very good." – Healthcare Provider

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When you have knowledge about your health you can feel empowered to make needed decisions about your care.

Try to be clear about what you want to know and at the same time listen to the information your healthcare provider is giving you. Do you understand? If not, try again. Ask your healthcare provider to spend more time explaining their answers.

And finally, you must feel comfortable with the members of your healthcare team to get the best results. You are developing a long-term relationship with many of them and need to feel confident that they can help you with any challenges you may face.

It is ok to ask for a second opinion or referral. This is your health and you need to feel comfortable that your team is the best one for you going forward.

Having a long-term health condition is not easy. It can be overwhelming, scary, depressing, and exhausting. But you don't have to cope with it alone.

Your healthcare team is there to help you every step of the way. Do everything you can to get the most from your team.

Remember, you will have more than 1 healthcare provider working together as a team; make sure all members of your care team send their reports to your primary care provider; ask questions in order to make informed decisions; take time to understand; ask for a second opinion or referral if you feel you need one; and last but certainly not least – you are the most important member of your care team. You know how you feel best so take an active role in your self-care.

None of this is easy. But it is up to you as the manager of your own self-care to make a commitment to take control of your health for the long-term.