

Self-Care Strategies: Day to Day Management

Becoming an active self-care manager is more than just dealing with doctors' appointments and medications - although they do go a long way to keeping you healthy. The daily decisions you make on food choices, physical activity, and stress relief also play a big part in the management of your overall health. Day to day management is key.

Food gives your body energy, builds muscle, helps repair and heal damage and can protect your body from further health problems. That's why what you choose to eat can make a big difference in your self-care management and overall health.

To make healthy food choices, keep these nutritional guidelines in mind:

choose healthy carbohydrates, like fruits, vegetables and whole grains; limit added sugars in processed foods like baked goods, chips and convenience foods; choose fats wisely being careful to avoid saturated and trans fats while increasing the amount of healthy fats you eat called monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats; limit your sodium, read the food label for hidden sodium in pre-prepared meals and snacks; and control your portion sizes.

Keep in mind that because you are living with a specific long-term health problem, you may have to further limit your choices in certain food categories; for example, if you have heart failure limiting foods high in sodium or salt can help relieve many symptoms and make you feel better. Talk to your healthcare provider about what types of foods you should include and what to avoid in order to stay healthy.

Getting regular physical activity is another daily decision that you can make to help you feel better. Your body needs to move. But when you have a long-term health problem you may be worried that exercise will do more harm than good.

Before you start a regular exercise program, meet with your healthcare provider to come up with an activity plan that is safe for you to do.

Most exercise programs will include three main forms of activity: aerobic, strength training and flexibility exercises. A complete exercise program will include all types of activities to benefit your entire body.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity each week with a minimum of 2 sessions of strength training in the same week.

When first starting out this may seem like a lot. But you can break down each session into small, doable bites. Try 10 minutes of aerobic exercise a few times a day. When you add them all up, you can get to 150 minutes in a week.

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As you make decisions each day, take a look at how your workload and schedule affects your stress. Stress can increase your symptoms, may cause flare-ups and can make your condition worse in both the short-term and long-term. Are you too stressed?

If the answer is yes, think about what is causing your stress day to day and think about ways to reduce that stress - because your health depends on it.

Can you start to say no to some of the extra projects you take on?

Can you learn some relaxation techniques, like listening to music or meditating to help reduce your stress?

If you feel stressed and aren't sure where to begin to reduce it, talk to your healthcare provider.

As an active self-care manager, you are working to take control of your condition so you can live your life the way you want to live it, every day.

Remember to:

Choose nutrient rich, healthy whole foods.

Avoid foods that will increase your symptoms.

Add a fun physical activity to your daily routine to get you moving.

And take an honest look at your workload and stress level to find ways to reduce it.

Healthy decisions every day can help you enjoy your life to the fullest – and that's the goal.