

# Self-Care Strategies: Using Your Support Team

As you live with a long-term health problem, there may be days when you feel overwhelmed, frustrated, angry, tired or stressed out. You do not get a break from a chronic disease and that can take a toll on your emotions and in turn your self-management.

But you are not alone. Many people have a chronic condition, some more than one. Look at your diagnosis as a chance to make your health your number one priority.

You don't have to do this alone. Reach out and get the support you need to help you deal with both the physical and emotional challenges living with a chronic illness can bring.

And because a chronic illness touches many different parts of your life, you may find you need the support of several people, from different areas of your life. This is your support network and they are there to help.

*"She's it, man, and I- I wouldn't want, you know, anybody else to be in my life right now. Yeah, I love my wife very much, man. She's always been there for me." – Archer, Patient*

*"I have two daughters that are beyond wonderful. One moved in and helped me for the first two or three weeks. The other one teaches at an all-year-round school and so she came every night to cook heart healthy for me."  
-Michele, Patient*

Start with the people closest to you, your family. They know you best and can help you with many of the challenges you face.

But depending on your relationship, you may find it difficult to ask for help. You may be afraid they will see you as weak. Asking for help does not make you a victim. As a positive self-manager, you are taking action to get the help you need. This is strength, not weakness.

Lean on your family, especially when you are frustrated and need encouragement. You may be surprised at how willing they are to help you and you may feel closer as a result.

Friends can also support you.

*"My neighbors next door to me all I had to do was bang on the wall and they were here like a second. If I needed anything, they were. Everybody was very helpful." – Wilfredo, Patient*

We all need an extra push every now and then and your friends can provide that. Friends can be great motivators, especially because you enjoy spending time with them and share similar interests.

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Your friends can also help you stick to your goals and treatments, but only if they know what you are trying to do. Make sure you talk to them about the challenges you face so they can be a source of support instead of a “bad influence”.

In addition to family and friends, community support groups can be a great source of support. Nothing takes the place of talking with people who know, firsthand, exactly what you’re going through.

You can also get useful ideas and information at support group meetings.

*“There’s a good feeling about being around people in similar situations, that- that you have a camaraderie you build up, a friendship you build up, just talking about your situation, talking about theirs, and how- how they’re recuperating and how you’re recovering and stuff.” – Kirk, Patient*

And many support groups are welcome to spouses and family members too which can help your loved ones understand a little more about what you are going through in order to help.

Some people find support through community based groups or religious organizations.

Volunteering or supporting others can also help put your condition into perspective. When you reach out to find support for yourself, you may just end up helping others along the way.

And remember, your healthcare team can be a great source of on-going support. Your team members can listen and support you when you may find it difficult to talk to others close to you.

*“It’s more than a job to them. They put their heart into it. You know, they- they let you know that they really care about you and your recovery.” – Archer, Patient*

Your loved ones, friends, support groups, religious organizations, and healthcare team, together form your support network and give you the strength to deal with many of the day to day and long-term challenges a chronic disease can bring. Use your support network to lift you up and give you the ongoing support you need to successfully manage your self-care. You don’t have to do it alone.