



CALIFORNIA
HEALTHCARE
FOUNDATION

Program for Elders in Managed Care

Managing Chronic Illness: Your Disease Does Not Define You

If you have a chronic illness, you know the day-to-day realities of managing your disease and balancing your life can be challenging. The goal of most people who have common diseases such as arthritis, high blood pressure (hypertension), diabetes, or lung disease – to name a few – is to live life as fully as possible. New research and demonstration projects have given us information about how people -- like you -- can take control of their illnesses and their lives^{1,2}. Through what are being called “self-management programs”, people with one or more chronic health problems can learn new ways to manage their illnesses in order to improve quality of life, enjoy greater independence and minimize future consequences of their disease.

Put Yourself In Charge

- Understand your disease – Read educational materials about your disease that are available at libraries, on websites and from your health care provider
- Before your medical appointments, write down questions you have to get the information you need from your health care provider.
- Seek out resources – There are community-based and non-profit organizations that offer patient education and support services about chronic diseases.
- Take a class on self-management of your disease – Your health provider and other community-based organizations often offer classes on disease-specific management.

Engage in Healthy Activity

- Increase your physical activity – Walking, swimming, yoga, tai chi are all options you can do to help improve the way you feel.
- Eat right – Learn how nutrition affects your disease and what foods are good and bad for you.

- Learn to relax – There are relaxation and pain management techniques that can help you deal with stress and discomfort that may be related to your chronic illness.
- Engage in activities you love to do – Going to the movies, spending time with friends and family, attend art classes or any activity that you enjoy can help you feel better.

Talk to your Physician and Ask Questions about your Disease

- Talk to your doctor - He or she will have suggestions about what you can do to better manage your disease.
- Ask where to find information – Your physician or senior center can point you to resources for programs and patient education materials.
- Write down questions – As questions or concerns arise about your disease between appointments write them down so you can remember.
- Tell your physician about your most important concerns.
- Don't forget to ask!

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1. Wilber, KH, Allen, D, Shannon, R, et al. "Partnering Managed Care and Community-Based Services for Frail Elders: The Care Advocate Program." J Am Geriatr Soc, 51:807-812, 2003.
 2. Graves MT, Slater, M, Maravilla, V, et al. "Implementing an Early Intervention Case Management Program in Three Medical Groups." TCM, 48-52, September/October 2003.