Everyday Healthy Living

Do you or someone in your family live with a chronic condition? Chronic diseases—such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, asthma, and arthritis—are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems in the U.S. Most households are affected by at least one chronic condition.

Manage Risks With Self-Care and Lifestyle Change

Daily self-care regimens and healthy lifestyle changes are essential to living with a chronic condition. From diet and physical activity to medications, self-monitoring, and other recommendations, managing chronic conditions requires a comprehensive approach to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives. And perhaps, healthy living is the best revenge!

Living a healthy lifestyle—to either manage or prevent chronic conditions—has been shown to have significant health and economic values. A recent study showed conclusively that you could reduce your risk of diabetes, heart attack, stroke, or cancer by 80% if you would just do 4 things:

1. Engage in regular physical activity.
2. Eat a healthy diet.
4. Avoid becoming obese.

Chronic diseases are costly to individuals, families, and companies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that chronic diseases account for 75% of health care spending. According to over 114,000 members who took the Highmark Wellness Profile in 2010, 14% reported having one or two chronic conditions, costing an estimated $31,468,704 ($1,965 per person) in lost productivity (the more chronic conditions, the less productivity.) Self-care and lifestyle change can help control this alarming and costly trend.

Know A Few Facts About Chronic Conditions

- **FACT:** 7 OUT OF 10 deaths among Americans each year are from chronic diseases.
- **FACT:** Heart disease, cancer, and stroke account for more than 50% of all deaths each year.
- **FACT:** Almost 1 OUT OF EVERY 2 adults have at least one chronic illness.
- **FACT:** About 1/4 of people with chronic conditions have one or more daily activity limitations.
- **FACT:** Arthritis is the most common cause of disability, with nearly 19 MILLION Americans reporting activity limitations.
Be Active in Your Health Care... Your Way

Managing or preventing chronic conditions means getting the right kinds of health care services—screenings, tests, counseling, immunizations and preventive medicine—at the right times. Different chronic conditions have different clinical care standards. Your doctor is always your best source for knowing what type of health care services and lifestyle changes you need to manage your condition or for determining if you are at increased risk for a certain condition.

Most people are more satisfied with their health care if they share the responsibility with their health care provider. Your doctor is an expert on medical care, but you are the expert on YOU. Only you can discuss your concerns and the concerns you may have because your father had a heart attack at age 48 and your grandmother’s history of diabetes. You need to inform your doctor about your blood pressure readings, glucose results, and other test and screening results. You also need to discuss any signs or symptoms that may concern you.

Begin taking an active role in your health care decisions. Make a list of questions to ask your doctor and make sure you understand the answers before you leave the office. Jot-down notes during the appointment. You might want to bring someone with you to help ask questions, listen, and remember. Ask if there are any changes since your last exam. Find out when you should return for your next exam. HERE ARE OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR DOCTOR:

• WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXERCISE IN HELPING TO MANAGE YOUR CONDITION? Exercise has many therapeutic benefits, including controlling blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure levels; reducing weight; improving range of motion and mobility; managing stress; and more. Ask your doctor if there are specific recommendations for cardio exercise, strength training, and flexibility, or if there are special precautions or limitation that you should take to stay healthy or prevent injury.

• WHAT DO YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT DIET FOR YOUR CONDITION? Do diet and nutrition play a role in your condition? Would you benefit from special dietary restrictions or modifications? What about nutrition supplements? Ask your doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian in your area to help you get a clinically-sound and personalized plan that’s right for you.

• HOW DOES WEIGHT IMPACT YOUR CONDITION? Weight impacts diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other chronic conditions. Work on losing 5-10% of your body weight, and you’ll see significant improvements in your condition management and health risks. Begin with losing 5 pounds and go from there.

• DO YOU NEED REFERRALS TO SPECIALISTS who might help you better manage your condition, such as registered dietitian, diabetes educator, cardiac rehab, physical therapist, podiatrist, dentist, psychologist, etc.? The more you learn about your condition, the better you can manage it.

• SHOULD YOU MONITOR YOUR CONDITION AT HOME, such as testing your blood sugars, checking your blood pressure, monitoring your weight, other blood tests, etc.?

Share responsibility for your health care. Talk with your family and friends about how they can support you. If one person in the family has a chronic condition, it impacts everyone. Plus, many chronic conditions run in the family, so a healthy change for the person with the chronic condition will benefit everyone.
Know About Medications

Doctors prescribe medications for good reasons. If you have a condition like heart disease, high blood pressure, COPD, congestive heart failure, or diabetes, medications will probably help you live longer and have fewer health problems. ALWAYS TAKE YOUR MEDICINE AS DIRECTED BY YOUR DOCTOR.

You should also speak with your doctor about vitamins, herbs, and other supplements that you are taking. Supplements, as well as over-the-counter medications, may interfere with the action of prescribed medication or may be contraindicated with certain conditions. Your local pharmacist is another good resource to help you learn about medications. Read on for some common questions that arise about medications.

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<th>FAQ’s</th>
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<td>What should I do if my medication causes unwanted side effects?</td>
<td>If a side effect impacts your ability to breathe, think, or function in a serious way, stop taking the medicine and call your doctor right away. If it’s more bearable (like a rash, a tingling sensation, or a headache), give it time for your body to adjust. Some side effects are self-limiting and will go away as the body adjusts to the medication.</td>
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<td>What if I can’t afford my medication?</td>
<td>Speak with your doctor about your concerns about the cost of your medications. It’s important to understand how your prescription benefits plan works. Ask if your medication is available in a generic form. You may be able to save money by getting a 90-day supply. In addition, some newer drugs may have a higher cost or higher co-pay associated with them. Ask your doctor if a lower cost drug is available.</td>
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<td>I have a hard time remembering to take my medicine. What should I do if I forget to take my medication?</td>
<td>Get a pillbox or a medicine organizer to help you keep track of whether you've taken your medication. Or, use your smart phone or electronic calendar to help remind you when to take your medication. If you take many different medications or have to take them more than once a day, ask your doctor if your routine could be simplified. There are some combination drugs and sustained-release drugs that make it easier to adhere to your pill regimen. (Note: It’s important to know your medications. Some medicines can be taken “late” while others cannot. When in doubt, call your doctor or pharmacist and ask what you should do if you forget to take a medicine as prescribed.)</td>
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<td>Why should I take medicine? I’m not a sick person.</td>
<td>Think of your medicine as one tool you use to stay healthy. Without it, you may become sick, develop a serious complication, or wind up in the hospital. If you need medication to keep a chronic condition under control, take it as directed, and you’ll be a “healthy person” who knows how to manage their chronic condition.</td>
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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIGHMARK RESOURCES

- Call to speak directly with a:
  - **BLUES ON CALL™ HEALTH COACH** at 1-888-BLUE-428 (1-888-258-3428) for questions about a health concern, prescription or upcoming surgery.
  - **MEMBER SERVICE** representative by calling the phone number on the back of your Member ID card for information about your health benefits.

- Log on to [www.highmarkblueshield.com](http://www.highmarkblueshield.com) to email a Blues On Call Health Coach with a question.

- Update or take a **WELLNESS PROFILE**, an easy online survey about your health that lays out a personalized action plan based on your needs and goals.

- Take an **ONLINE WELLNESS PROGRAM** for chronic conditions, diabetes, and much more.

- Access great **MEMBER DISCOUNTS** of up to 50% on non-covered wellness products and services from leading national companies.