

Coping with Chronic Health Problems

Being diagnosed with a chronic or long-term health condition, such as diabetes, arthritis, asthma or COPD, can be stressful and discouraging. How will it change your lifestyle and future?

For example, you may need to:

- cope with pain or discomfort from your symptoms
- adjust to new limitations
- manage your condition and practice self-care
- cope with feeling frustrated or depressed

First, set aside negative thoughts. They can wear you down and steal your energy. Instead, take control of getting healthier. If you approach your condition with knowledge and confidence, you will adapt to it more easily.

Learn about your condition. Ask your health care provider specific questions, including how to do more in-depth research from trusted resources. Learning to properly manage your condition can help control or reverse the symptoms.



Examples: Learn about your medications and how and when to use them. If you have arthritis or chronic pain, explore physical therapy to learn proper exercises that can help protect or enhance your strength. If you have diabetes, learn what affects your blood-glucose level.



Fit your treatment plan into your daily life. The right combination of self-care, medications, exercise and eating right are crucial to lifelong health. Stick to positive health choices even when you start feeling better.

Raise your personal comfort level. Choose activities that can also help manage stress and negative emotions. For example, you might include yoga, meditation, listening to music, volunteering and spending quality time with good friends.

Maintain supportive relationships. If your health sometimes limits your time and energy for socializing, don't feel guilty. Maintain relationships that provide support and understanding of your lifestyle; avoid people and situations that add stress.



Get help for depression. Feeling negative at times when dealing with a chronic condition is normal. But if you frequently feel lonely or hopeless, reach out to others who want to listen and help. Talk with your family and friends, your health care provider or a counselor or join a support group for your condition.

Coordinate your health care services. When seeing multiple providers, such as a specialist for lung disease or heart failure, keep a record of who they are and the services they provide. Ask your primary health care provider to help coordinate your various treatments and overall care.

Time for a lifestyle shakeup?

Treating chronic conditions nearly always involves making changes in our daily lives. Beyond medication and diet, you may be advised to lose weight, exercise regularly or stop smoking or drinking alcohol. Lifestyle changes may not seem relevant at the time of your diagnosis, but they could be essential to restoring your health and feeling better in general.

Change is hard — to make it easier, take 1 step at a time. For example:

- To quit smoking, choose 2 or 3 key ways to lessen the stress in your life.
- To eat better, add 1 new vegetable recipe to your diet per week.
- To lose weight, track your daily food choices.