



Tips for following through on TREATMENT AND MANAGING YOUR HEALTH

Issue 4

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care.

1 Whenever you start new medication or treatment, watch carefully for possible side effects or other problems

It can be hard to know how your body will respond to a new medication or treatment. For your safety, keep a careful watch on your health during the hours and days after you start the medication or treatment.

- Don't hesitate to call your doctor's office if you notice any new symptoms or problems. You also have access to your health plan's nurse line, see your ID card for the number.
- Even if you are feeling a lot better after a few days, make sure to follow through with the full course of treatment. Don't make changes in your treatment or stop a recommended treatment without first talking with your doctor.

2 Gather information to learn about your health condition treatment

To get good quality care, **you need to be informed and involved**. After a medical visit, you should learn more about your health condition and treatment.

- Getting more information can help you understand issues involved in your care and things you can do to help recover as quickly as possible.
- If you have decisions to make about your treatment, learning more can help you understand your options. Depending on your situation, you might be able to find information that tells about research that has been done to find out which types of treatment work best for your condition.

Learn More

This government publication by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality will help you find reliable information about many specific diseases: **"Next Steps After Your Diagnosis: Finding Information and Support"** (www.ahrq.gov/consumer/diaginfo.htm).

Here are other suggestions for finding the information you need:

- **Ask your doctor or other health professional for advice** on where you should look to get more information about your health condition or treatment choices.
- **Check with your health plan.** Call Member Services at your health plan and ask about available programs for your condition.

3

If you have a long-term condition, learn ways to stay healthy and get the support you need

Many people have on-going or long-term health conditions such as high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, depression, migraine headaches, and some types of allergies. **If you have an ongoing health condition, the *day-to-day* management of your condition is really up to you.**

- You are the one who has to follow through on doing what you need to do for your condition and schedule the appointments to get the regular medical care that is recommended.
- You are the one who knows the most about your own body and decides when you can handle a symptom on your own and when you need to go in for care.

Tips for managing your health

To stay as healthy as you can with an ongoing health condition, you need to be informed and involved. Getting information and support can help. Here are three suggestions:

1. Know what types of regular care you need for your condition and stay on schedule for getting this care.

You might think that everyone who has an ongoing condition would get the regular care that is needed for their condition, but studies show that many do not. For example, many people with diabetes do not get all of the blood tests, eye exams, foot exams, and other care they need to help prevent complications of diabetes.

To be sure you are getting good quality care, you need to take an active part in finding out what types of regular care you should be getting – and then make sure you get this care. To learn about the quality standards for your condition, ask your doctor and check with the national associations, non-profit groups, and government agencies that focus on your condition (examples are the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association).

2. Make healthy lifestyle choices.

Your lifestyle choices have a big impact on your health, *especially* if you already have an ongoing health condition. Staying physically active, not smoking, eating healthy foods, and keeping a healthy weight are lifestyle choices that will help you feel better and can help prevent your health condition from getting worse.

3. Get the support you need.

Support groups can be a great source of encouragement and practical advice. Participating in a support group discussion can help you understand more about how to handle the day-to-day management of your particular health condition or help you make changes toward a healthier lifestyle. For some long-term conditions, support groups are available on-line, and some have a panel of medical experts who answer questions. To get help in finding an in-person or online support group, ask your doctor or your health plan.