

MANAGING CHRONIC DISEASES

The CDC states that 6 in 10 adults in the United States have one chronic disease, and 4 in 10 American adults have two or more.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes chronic disease as "a condition that lasts one year or more and requires ongoing medical attention or limits daily living activities or both". Common chronic diseases include heart disease, diabetes, cancer, depression, obesity, hypertension, and arthritis. The incidence of chronic disease is increasing.

While there are many causes of chronic diseases, the CDC points to four risk behaviors that contribute to or cause many of them:

- Tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke
- Poor nutrition, specifically diets that are low in fruits and vegetables and high in saturated fat and sodium
- Lack of physical activity, especially when associated with obesity
- Excessive use of alcohol

Some chronic diseases cause symptoms, while others do not. Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, normally has no symptoms, earning it the designation of a "silent killer". Diabetes can cause frequent urination, excessive thirst and hunger, blurry vision, and extreme fatigue. Unfortunately, the first symptom of a chronic condition, such as heart disease, can be as serious as a heart attack or stroke.

Regular checkups, including bloodwork with your primary care physician, can help with early diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases. Attending your annual physical also increases your chance of finding elevated biometrics, which provides you with the opportunity to make healthy lifestyle changes to avoid a diagnosis.

While being diagnosed with a chronic disease can be distressing, it's important to understand that most chronic diseases are manageable. Let's look at some techniques you can use to care for yourself and maintain as normal a life as possible.

In addition to affecting the quality of life of individuals who suffer from them, chronic diseases are responsible for much of America's \$3.5 trillion in annual health care costs. Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in the United States.

Educate Yourself

A chronic disease diagnosis might leave you feeling helpless, but there are steps you can take to empower yourself. One step is to learn everything you can about your condition – causes, possible complications, treatments, costs and potential effects of medications.

Becoming as knowledgeable as possible about your condition can help you better communicate with your doctor, recognize new or worsening symptoms, understand treatment options, and identify steps you can take to improve your overall health.

Knowledge is power and will help you be the best possible advocate for yourself. Check out these reliable sources for information on diabetes.

- [ConnectCare3](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus](#)

Manage Your Stress

Living with a chronic disease can be stressful and cause you to worry excessively, making the disease worse. Having someone to confide in when you feel overwhelmed can make a big difference in how you cope with your condition. Sometimes seeking professional advice is warranted. A counselor, especially one trained in dealing with chronic diseases, can teach you coping techniques to use when you feel overwhelmed.

Exercise can also help manage stress and techniques such as meditation, guided imagery, yoga or tai-chi.



Find a Health Partner

Identifying someone who will attend medical appointments and help advocate for you can be reassuring and helpful as you receive and process information and advice from medical professionals. While any trusted friend or family member can assume this role, ideally, the person you choose will have some knowledge of your condition and experience interacting with health care providers.

Many people find medical appointments stressful and achieve better results when they have someone along who can help guide the conversation and serve as a second set of eyes and ears.

You also can look for a support group offered by a hospital or other organization within your community or contact your insurance company to see if it provides any support or education opportunities.

ConnectCare3's Chronic Disease Management and Prevention program is also an excellent option for those living with a chronic condition. Our multi-disciplinary team can help you understand and manage your chronic disease through lifestyle changes.

Work on Lifestyle Changes

Making changes to your lifestyle isn't always easy, but it is entirely possible. According to experts, the trick is to start slowly with a goal of achieving a little bit at a time. For instance, if your health care provider advises you to begin exercising, start with a walk around the block, gradually building up to a longer walk or even a jog.

Pay special attention to your diet, as there is a direct connection between the foods you consume and your overall health. A well-balanced diet consists primarily of fresh fruits and vegetables and lean proteins. Strive to minimize intake of added salts and sugar, fatty meats, sugar-sweetened beverages and processed foods.

If you smoke, it's essential that you stop. Quitting smoking can be challenging, but there is help available. ConnectCare3's Tobacco Cessation program can help with achieving and maintaining your quit goals.

Practicing an overall healthy lifestyle, including exercise, healthy eating, eliminating tobacco use, and limiting alcohol use, can improve your overall health and help you manage a chronic disease.

Remain Positive

Stay in touch with your primary care provider and follow their advice. Practice good self-care and find someone to talk to if you begin to feel anxious or depressed.

Managing a chronic disease may not always be easy, and there may be setbacks along the way. But deciding to care for your overall health along with the chronic disease can increase your chances of living a satisfying, productive, and meaningful life.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/infographic/chronic-diseases.htm>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/six-relaxation-techniques-to-reduce-stress>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/chronic-illness>