

Caregiver's Corner Column (March 2015)

Questions and Answers for Caregivers Dealing with Chronic Diseases

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What is Chronic Disease?

It is condition that cannot be cured, but can be treated or controlled. Examples of chronic diseases: chronic kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, heart disease, hypertension, and many other illnesses.

Why is it important to talk about chronic illness?

As each generation ages, modern medicine allows us to live longer by treating chronic conditions. Medications and treatments are available that allow people to extend their life expectancies, while still providing quality of life. Often people who are dealing with chronic illness, must rely on family members and loved ones for additional support and caregiving.

How can I or someone I care for cope with chronic illness?

Often when people are diagnosed with chronic illness, there is a period of adjustment. People may have to change their lifestyle. They may need to attend more medical appointments, change their diet, or add new medications or treatments. A person dealing with chronic illness may grieve or feel a sense of loss. A loss of independence, a loss of control or even a loss of good health. It is common to have feelings of denial about the situation or concerns about the future. These emotions can also affect the people around you. It's important to talk to the people who care about you.

What can I do if I or someone I am care for are not coping well?

If you feel that you or someone you are caring for are not coping well, talk to your doctor about this. Depression and anxiety can be a common issue for people dealing with chronic illness and sometimes even for their caregivers. If you or your loved one's mood is affected and does not seem to improve over the course of a few weeks, you should ask your doctor about it. It's important that you don't feel alone when dealing with chronic illness. Look into joining a support group or even consider talking to a counselor. Some people do not want to seek support for their mental health issues. There is an old stigma associated with treating our emotional health. But when we have strep throat, we go to the doctor for an antibiotic. When we break our arm, we go to the doctor for a cast. When dealing with emotional issues, it's also important to take care of our mental health as well. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

What can I do to successfully deal with chronic illness?

It is important to educate yourself. The best source of information will be your or your loved one's doctor. Come prepared to any doctor's appointments. Prior to the appointment: make a list

of all medications, write down any questions that you have, and make notes of any issues related to you or your loved one's condition. Learn to be a health care advocate for yourself and those in your care. If you want more education about a specific chronic condition, ask your doctor about trusted sources of information. Do not believe everything that you read on the internet. Not every internet source has been thoroughly researched or edited. You may have caring friends and family members that also want to offer you advice. Even though they mean well, not everyone dealing with a certain condition may have the same treatment regimen. Learning more about your or your loved one's chronic disease, can help ease your concerns and anxieties. In the age of changing health care, become an informed and educated consumer.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.