



This document is part of California's Valued Trust (CVT) educational series

Be Informed. Be Involved.

Know your health care choices.

This educational series is a resource to help you get good quality health care. For more resources, visit our Web site at www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved.

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

When you start new medication or treatment, it can be hard to know how your body will respond. 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 with any questions or concerns you may have. If you notice any new symptoms or problems, be sure to let your doctor know right away.
- 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 more about your health condition and treatment**

Good quality health care does not happen automatically. To get good quality care, you need to be informed and involved. After a medical visit, you may want to 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 make decisions that are right for you. Depending on your situation, you might be able to find information that tells about scientific research that has been done to find out which types of treatment work best for your condition.



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).

Visit CVT’s Web site www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved (employees.com/healthinfo) for these resources:

- “Information about health care quality: what it is and where to find it.”
- “How you can use information about health care quality to get better care: Seven examples.”
- “To get better health care, be informed and involved.”
- “Tips for getting care that works best for your condition.”
- “Tips for getting the right amount of care.”
- “A list of recommended websites that have trustworthy health information.”

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 for information on 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, cancer, 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’re 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 National Cancer Institute).

2. Make healthy lifestyle choices.

Your lifestyle choices have a big impact on your health, *especially* if already you 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.



CVT's Web site www.cvtrust.org/resources/beinformedbeinvolved has many other tip sheets to help you get good quality care, including the following:

- "Tips on what to do *before* your health care appointment."
- "Tips on what to do *during* your health care appointment."

Source: These materials were adapted from the *Communication Toolkit: Using information to get high quality care*. The American Institutes for Research developed the Toolkit materials with funding from the California HealthCare Foundation. The National Business Group on Health maintains and host the Toolkit website.

