

# MY CHOICES

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## A Planner for Healing

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**Caring Ambassadors Program**

*Empowering people to be ambassadors for their own health since 1997*



**MY CHOICES: A Planner for Healing® v2** is not a substitute for medical advice.  
Consult with your physician about any matter concerning your health,  
including if you experience new or changing symptoms.

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# What You Do Matters

## *A Personal Message*

We all wish for a magic pill to cure any health problem we may face, but the reality is, a simple solution doesn't exist for the chronic health conditions that impact the majority of Americans. That's because when it comes to your health and well-being, outcomes are not just determined by a pill that you take, but by the CHOICES you make in all aspects of your health care.

When I was faced with a life-threatening health condition, I wanted to know all my odds. What I figured out was that there are no studies in which they track patients who are engaged and actively supporting their own health versus ones who are just taking the drugs or treatment. So, I had to figure out a better way.

I studied and got advice from individuals who had beat the odds: people who were told to go home and die and yet were living active, healthy lives years later; people who were told the symptoms of their challenging health condition would control their lives, only to have those symptoms disappear; people who were considered outliers. What did they do? How were they different? Each one of them in one way or another followed the principles outlined in this book.

Patients have a right to know the extra activities they can do to tip the scales in their favor. Nobody can predict the exact timeline and outcomes for a patient with a challenging health condition, because each patient has “free will” to choose behaviors or activities that have been seen or proven to increase the odds.

Don't believe me, ask your health care provider these simple questions:

**Do patients with a positive attitude tend to do better?**

**Do patients who eat right and exercise tend to do better?**

**Do patients who are stressed and have negative attitudes tend to do worse?**

**What do they notice are some of the keys to being successful with a treatment or protocol?**

At first, I was overwhelmed and scared to make changes. But as I saw the results these ‘outlier’ patients had, I figured, *Why not give it a try? What's the downside? Why not give myself the best chance to heal?* I have met so many brave people who are willing to endure great pain and side effects from difficult treatments, but when given the opportunity to reduce the side effects or increase the odds of a successful treatment, fail to find the motivation to take the extra step. Try to figure out what is holding you back. If you can find it, it may save your life. I know it did mine.

Here is what I learned on my healing journey and my advice to others facing a health challenge for the road ahead:

- **Choose your health care team like your life depends on it**
- **Ask questions of everyone**
- **Understand all aspects of your health condition**
- **Listen to your body, trust your intuition**
- **Be brave in all aspects of health**

We know you're brave in the health challenges you face. Now, be an Ambassador for your own health by being BOLD in the CHOICES you make. This book will help guide you.



***THIS IS YOUR JOURNEY, THESE ARE YOUR CHOICES.***

-Randy Dietrich

Chair, Board of Directors  
Caring Ambassadors Program, Inc.





## FOREWARD

**Imagine** if your chronic health condition were actually an opportunity to live a healthier, more meaningful life...

**Imagine** that you could put together a health care team comprised of the best medical doctors and healthcare practitioners, with you at the center...

**Imagine** that you knew the best treatments from all areas of health care and were committed to maintaining them....

**Imagine** that you were working on building a solid support system, managing stress, following the best nutritional guidance, nurturing your spirituality and mental and emotional health...

How much better off do you think you'd be?

**Remember, this is your JOURNEY...**  
**These are your CHOICES.**

**Healing is possible...**  
***How you achieve it is up to you.***

# FOREWARD

## *Now what?*

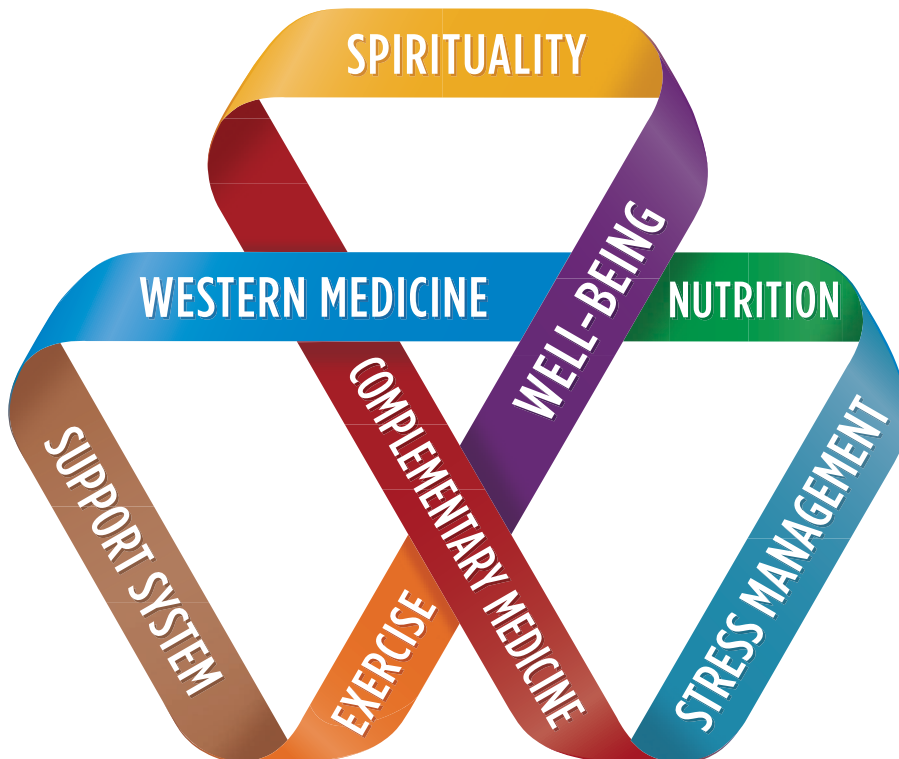
Being confronted with a chronic health condition can make you feel as though something else has suddenly taken control of your journey through life. How do you decide your next steps? What are the best treatment options? Is there anything you can do to improve your health outcomes and prognosis, or is your future set in stone? Do you have any control?

## **You certainly do.**

Through the choices you make in the journey ahead, you have the power to tip the scales in the favor of health, well-being, and healing. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. By making healthy, personalized choices regarding your lifestyle, Western and complementary treatment options, and all aspects of your health, you can give yourself every opportunity to be successful in your healing journey.

**Reflect on each section of the Integrative Health Ribbon below individually, asking yourself:**

***Can I ignore this aspect of my health and still heal?***





# INTRODUCTION

## What is *MY CHOICES: A Planner for Healing*©?

The Caring Ambassadors Program, through *MY CHOICES: A Planner for Healing*© (**MY CHOICES**), encourages you to make choices that will empower you to take control of your health care decisions...and your future. **MY CHOICES** is a tool to help you recognize and act upon what you can control in your health care journey to achieve optimal healing, regardless of the health condition you face. It contains elements of a guide book, health planner, journal, and activity book to help orient you to and plan for the journey ahead. This planner promotes an integrative approach to health and medicine by challenging you to make informed decisions in all aspects of your health care and incorporate them into a personal health care and wellness plan.

## Why did we create *MY CHOICES*?

...**Because** over half of Americans live with at least one chronic disease

...**Because** being diagnosed with a chronic disease or health condition is distressing, navigating life with one can be overwhelming, and the recently diagnosed often feel powerless over what lies ahead

...**Because** “Maintaining or enhancing quality of life for individuals living with chronic illnesses has not been given the attention it needs...” (Institute of Medicine)

...**Because** health is determined by more than what’s on your medical chart

...**Because** Western medicine should be the cornerstone of a solid health care plan, but it alone is not enough to treat the body, mind, and spirit

...**Because** you have the right to know about and practice all areas of health care that may contribute to your healing

...**Because** strong and mounting evidence demonstrates the benefits of integrative medicine and approaches for chronic disease treatment, management, and recovery

...**Because** the Caring Ambassadors Program aims to distill the abundance of knowledge, lessons, and expert input acquired over the past two decades into a user-friendly manual that will educate, empower and motivate anyone facing any chronic health condition

...**Because** you DO have influence over what lies ahead. Don’t let anyone convince you otherwise. This Planner serves to guide you.

# INTRODUCTION

Anyone impacted by a chronic health condition can benefit from **MY CHOICES**. Users who may find the tool particularly helpful include:

- 1) Those recently diagnosed with a chronic health condition who may be feeling distressed, overwhelmed, and confused by the health care decisions that lay ahead
- 2) Those who have been managing their health condition, but may feel discouraged by lack of progress or poor quality of life and who want to explore additional tools and strategies for living well
- 3) Those motivated to incorporate integrative therapies and/or lifestyle changes into their overall health plan
- 4) Anyone who wishes to improve their health

## How can **MY CHOICES** help you?

The goal of **MY CHOICES** is to create a more motivated, empowered, and informed subset of the chronic health condition community by helping people recognize and act upon what they can control in their health care journey to achieve optimal healing. Specifically, we hope that this book helps you to:

- ◆ Understand that healing is achieved by addressing all aspects of health
- ◆ Increase your knowledge and understanding of integrative health and complementary treatment approaches
- ◆ Get motivated to make meaningful health care and lifestyle changes and decisions that will improve your overall health and outcomes
- ◆ Become an active participant in your own health care
- ◆ Make informed, personalized decisions on all aspects of your health care
- ◆ Access reputable resources for aspects of health care addressed in this book
- ◆ Gain a sense of control and the hope that healing is possible, despite life with a chronic health condition

## What is healing?

The Caring Ambassadors defines ‘healing’ as a process of restoration to a state of wholeness and fulfilment; physical healing from one’s health condition may or may not be a part of this process. Healing is a process by which well-being is achieved and quality of life is improved.



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What is your definition of healing?

# INTRODUCTION

## How to Use

**MY CHOICES** is a tool to help you tip the scales toward health when facing a chronic health condition. This tool is broken up into three main sections. All the sections incorporate activities and reflection exercises, so be sure to have the space, time, and resources available to sufficiently engage with **MY CHOICES**.

We encourage you to go through each section of this tool in order. However, you may find that particular subjects within each section are more relevant to your experience, so feel free to focus on those sections first, and revisit others at a later time.

**Starting Your Journey** contains content and activities to help you develop a productive, motivated mindset for the journey ahead.

**Health Care Options** contains information on health care approaches.

**Act** provides action-oriented information and activities to put integrative health care principles into practice.

**MY CHOICES** is designed to be used as a stand-alone tool. However, we encourage you to visit our website: [caringambassadors.org](http://caringambassadors.org) for additional information, resources, research and tools to supplement the content in this book.

Whenever appropriate, we encourage you to discuss the contents of this tool and your health care goals with your health care team. It is very important to inform each of your health care providers/practitioners about all the treatment approaches you are using. This is particularly important if you choose an integrative medicine approach that involves healthcare practitioners or treatments from several different medical disciplines.

## Visual Glossary



Writing exercises and are intended to be completed in the book as you work your way through **MY CHOICES**



Private reflections that can serve as journaling prompts or simply questions to ponder on your healing journey



Challenge prompts to push you to to the next level of self-advocacy and behavior change to improve your whole health



Scientific evidence from peer-reviewed journals or reputable health authorities



# INTRODUCTION

## Glossary

Below are a few terms that you'll see used throughout **MY CHOICES** and definitions that the Caring Ambassadors uses for each of them.

**Chronic:** Continuing or occurring again and again for a long time (Merriam-Webster)

**Chronic disease:** A disease or condition that usually lasts for 3 months or longer and may get worse over time. Chronic diseases can usually be controlled but not cured. The most common types of chronic disease are cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis. (National Cancer Institute)

*The Caring Ambassadors uses the term 'chronic disease' when referencing scientific evidence or discussing disease diagnosis and treatment in the medical setting.*

**Chronic health condition:** Broader than 'chronic disease', this is the catch-all term most frequently used by the Caring Ambassadors to describe *all diagnosed diseases and undiagnosed illnesses that impact individuals' health or well-being*, that are extended in time or recurring, do not resolve naturally, and are rarely cured completely.

**Evidence-based** (as in, evidence-based medicine or treatment): Integrating the best external evidence and clinical experience into a medical or treatment approach. This means that treatment decisions should be informed by what the best scientific evidence or empirical (measurable; not based on theory or belief) research tells us plus a health care provider's experience and knowledge of the patient's situation. Neither a provider's opinion nor external evidence alone are sufficient to be considered an "evidence-based" approach; it is the combination of the two factors that meets the definition.

**Integrative** (e.g., 'integrative health care' or 'integrative medicine') An approach recognizing that:

**1)** Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization); **2)** a multitude of internal and external factors (genetics, lifestyle, environment, social determinants, access to care, etc.) influence disease, health and well-being, and, therefore; **3)** all appropriate practitioners and evidence-based therapies – conventional and/or complementary – should be explored to optimize health.

**Holistic:** Pertaining to one's whole self: body, mind, spirit

**Heal or healing:** There is no standard definition for 'heal' or 'healing', and the act of healing – whether from a chronic health condition or another transformative life event – will look different for everyone. The Caring Ambassadors defines 'healing' as a process of restoration to a state of wholeness and fulfillment; physical healing from one's health condition may or may not be a part of this process. Healing is a process by which well-being is achieved and quality of life is improved.

# INTRODUCTION

## Who are the Caring Ambassadors?

The Caring Ambassadors Program is a nationally recognized patient advocacy organization working tirelessly to empower patients with challenging health conditions to make personally appropriate choices to optimize their overall wellness day-by-day. Our disease specific programs for Hepatitis C and Lung Cancer have been helping people obtain the support, assistance, and information they need for over 20 years. We also provide information, tools and resources to help those with any chronic health condition not only manage their health care after a diagnosis but improve their quality of life and capacity for healing.



*Caring Ambassadors MY CHOICES Development Team*

We are comprised of a passionate team of staff and leaders who have faced our own health challenges, but don't let them define us. Our work and our voice are guided by our values: Information empowers. Patient engagement is necessary for optimum wellness. Health is holistic. Patient-centered care is optimal care. Evidence-based information is necessary for good decision making. Collaboration and integration benefit all patients.

Learn more about us at: [caringambassadors.org](https://caringambassadors.org)

**MY CHOICES** contact: [mychoices@caringambassadors.org](mailto:mychoices@caringambassadors.org)

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

— Margaret Mead



# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

The first, and quite possibly most challenging barrier you'll have to address on this journey is your mindset: your attitude, perceptions, and beliefs about the road ahead with a chronic health condition. Healing can only begin when a mindset clouded by uncertainty, negativity, and hopelessness starts to shift to one that embraces hope and determination. A few core concepts, which form the foundation of Caring Ambassadors Program's values, can facilitate this mindset shift:

- 1) You have choices in your health care that can shape the outcome of your journey.
- 2) By having choices, you DO have control (don't let anyone tell you otherwise).
- 3) Health and wellness are shaped by body, mind and spirit, not merely the presence or absence of disease or disability.
- 4) Well-being and an enhanced quality of life can be achieved in many ways.
- 5) Healing is possible.

*Cry, wail, scream, hop up and down, punch your pillow, blame yourself, sob, blame everybody else, rail against the universe, attempt to write your obituary, and/or whatever else you need to do. At some point, though, you are going to have to face it. It's time to make some choices. You have to do SOMETHING.*

— Jessica Steinberg, lung cancer survivor

The process by which a shift in mindset occurs after being faced with a chronic health condition isn't linear or predictable. But a few mental steps are key to adopting the mindset you'll need to take action and become an ambassador for your own health:

- 1) **Accept the Journey**
- 2) **Address Fears**
- 3) **Find Motivation**
- 4) **Establish Goals**
- 5) **Contemplate Change**
- 6) **Commit to 'Setting the Table'**

You are invited to reflect upon each of these steps over the next few pages and explore how they might apply to your journey by completing the following activities.

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Accept the Journey

Being struck with a chronic health condition may feel like being stuck in a bad dream. All of a sudden, your world has changed, and things that you once believed may no longer hold true. Perhaps to cope, you've denied this new reality, hoping that you will soon wake up and life will be back to the way it was. This response is completely understandable; denial is a natural part of the coping process. It can be difficult to move forward when in denial, but moving through your denial can be a crucial step in opening up your healing process. To get started, you must first accept that, whether you like it or not, you are on a journey.

It can be helpful to look at your diagnosis as an opportunity, which at this stage in your journey may understandably be a very difficult thing to do. But for many people, being confronted with a chronic health condition can be a turning point, and the motivation to live a more thoughtful, purposeful, and healthier life. Although it seems counter-intuitive, a chronic health condition can actually be a life-enhancing opportunity, forcing us to take stock of what matters in life, and for many of us, to nourish our whole selves for the first time.

*“When opportunity knocks on your door, it is not always a friendly or welcome sound. Sometimes, the opportunity is hidden in the very concerning and frightening sound of a doctor telling you that you have a serious, perhaps even life-threatening illness. Often, there can be a positive outcome, and there are ways to turn these words into a positive life experience.”*

— Jim Possehl, Founder, Caring Ambassadors Program

Accepting your journey and the reality of your life with a chronic health condition does not mean surrendering or letting it define you. You are the exact same person the day after your diagnosis that you were the day before. You possess the same talents, harbor the same potential, and maintain the same relationships that have always existed.

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Accept the Journey

When confronted with a chronic health condition, it's easy to focus on how life is going to change, but important to remember that everything that makes you "You" can and likely will sustain. Let the journey ahead define you, not your health condition.

Respond to the following questions:

- ◆ What brings me joy in life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ What are my natural talents?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ What draws other people to me?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ What about myself am I proud of?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ What and who represent my most fulfilling relationships in life?



The answers you provided above are inextricable pieces of You. How can they serve you on the journey ahead?

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Address Fears

You may fear for your future, or that of your loved ones. Fear of pain, fear of dependence, fear of being defined by your chronic health condition, fear of dying... these are all valid and normal fears to experience in the wake of a challenging diagnosis. Much of this fear is often rooted in one hazy concept: the unknown. When faced with the unknown, especially as it relates to your health, it's easy to take a worst-case scenario approach. But worst-case scenarios rarely come to fruition.

Most often, chronic health conditions follow a rather standard progression hovering somewhere in the middle between “worst case scenario” and “miraculous recovery”. When faced with the unknown, your mental state and outlook can make a big difference in your quality of life. Focusing on the worst-case scenario can quickly lead to a negative spiral of anxiety, depression, and isolation: all conditions which are known to negatively influence health outcomes. On the other hand, focusing on realistic alternatives to the worst-case scenario – and better yet, best case scenarios – can instill hope, happiness, and optimism, all powerful forces in recovery and healing.

You can be hopeful without being naive. When fear of the future or making a big change for your health has you down, don't be afraid to find hope and the courage to push forward by looking for success stories or outliers who have enjoyed positive outcomes, despite all the odds. Hope is a powerful mechanism in the healing process.

*“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”*

— Viktor E. Frankel

Fear associated with a chronic health condition is powerful, but you can harness its power for good. Fear can motivate us to take a proactive approach to our health and to do everything within our control to tip the scales from “worst case scenario” to “best case scenario”.



Life is full of beauty, and wonder, and things, and people to cherish. A chronic health condition, even at its worst, only strips away our ability to experience some of them. What are the beautiful parts of your life? What will likely endure, even if your health condition progresses in a way which you fear?

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Addressing Fear

Fear is a natural reaction when confronted with a chronic health condition. What we do with our fears — whether we allow them to hold us captive or confront them head-on — is a choice. Negative thoughts can impact emotions and behaviors. Cognitive behavioral therapy explores the relationship between thoughts, behaviors, and emotions and is a strategy used to address negative thinking and the fear it produces. Take some time to think about the impact of your thoughts by answering some of these questions:

- ◆ When it comes to your chronic health condition, what is the scenario you fear most?
- ◆ Are you 100% sure that this scenario will come true?
- ◆ What is the evidence that this scenario will come true? What is the evidence against it?
- ◆ What would you tell a good friend who had the same fear?
- ◆ Think of this fear as a “worst-case scenario”, what are two alternative scenarios you could realistically expect, that you consider “better-case” scenarios?
- ◆ How can you change your behaviors, goals, or mindset to shift your focus from the worst-case scenario to one of your alternative “better case-scenarios”?



Who in your life offers an example of hope? Do I know others who have faced similar challenges with positive outcomes? How can I connect with them?

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Find Motivation

What is most important to you in life? What brings you joy? What do you live for?

These questions all seek to arrive at the same answer, and the answer is important for the journey ahead: It is your life's aspiration, your motivation to heal.

Discovering your true motivation is so important, because it centers you in your life's meaning and purpose, and it helps instill focus, commitment, and determination on the road ahead. When you're able to keep sight of your ultimate motivation to heal, you'll be able to set and achieve goals and face challenges with more conviction.

“*Cancer didn't bring me to my knees,  
it brought me to my feet.*”

— Michael Douglas, actor & survivor of throat cancer

Think BIG! Start with your ultimate aspiration, and then work your way backward to figure out which areas of your health you, with the help of your health care team, can address to achieve it. A dream vacation, revisiting your childhood home, a reunion with an old friend, a physical feat, a big celebration, dancing with your partner, learning a new language...any of these things and a million more could serve as your motivation to persevere on the journey ahead. Picture what brings you the most joy in life, and let that image be your guide.



# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Finding Motivation

***What do you live for?*** What is your ultimate motivation to heal? **Think BIG!**

What would realizing this motivation feel like? Look like? Record it below in words, pictures, names, drawings... anything that represents why you will do all that it takes to live well and stay as healthy as possible!

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Establish Goals

Motivation and goals go hand-in-hand. Once you've identified your motivation – what it is you want to live, heal, and thrive for – you can start thinking about the steps it will take to get there. You can think about these steps as your individual goals for healing.

Each goal represents both a challenge and an opportunity, and the accomplishment of achieving each goal – big or small – is a reason to celebrate. What should your goals be and how do you identify them? Here are some tips:

### Work your way backward

Your goals and your motivation should be aligned. Start with the big picture: your ultimate motivation. What would need to happen to realize that vision? What about your life and health would need to change?

### Think holistically

Health and wellness aren't only dependent on your physical state, so think beyond making that the only area your goals target. What goals could you work towards in other areas of your life that might improve your overall health and well-being? You may find it helpful to review the health care options in the next section of this planner to identify all the areas your goals might address to help you heal.

### Inform your health care providers

It's important for all your health care providers to be aware of the goals you set for yourself, so that they can prescribe or direct you to the best treatments and resources to help you achieve them. Share your goals with your health care providers. Better yet, use some of the time with your provider(s) to set your health care goals.

The ACT section of this planner will provide you with guidance and activities to help you plan, organize, and work toward your current and future goals.

***Life is difficult. Not just for me or other ALS patients. Life is difficult for everyone. Finding ways to make life meaningful and purposeful and rewarding, doing the activities that you love and spending time with the people you love - I think that's the meaning of this human experience.***

— Steve Gleason, ALS patient

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Establish Goals

- 1) Work your way backward: Your goals should support and align with your ultimate motivation. Record your motivation from page 7 here:
- 2) Think holistically: Your motivation represents where you ultimately want to be. How do you get there? Use the below table to help you identify the areas of your health care that you may want to address when establishing your goals. Rate each area from **1 (“low” or “poor”)** to **5 (“high” or “excellent”)**. Remember, health is holistic, and all areas of your health play a role in the healing process.

	Where I am now	Where I want to be
<b>Exercise:</b> Maintaining a healthy level of activity; Incorporating exercise and movement into your daily life		
<b>Food and nutrition:</b> Fueling and nurturing your body from the inside with healthy food and drink, moderate portions, and plenty of whole foods; Avoiding processed foods and over-consumption		
<b>Well-being:</b> Having an overall sense of emotional and mental health; Feeling fulfilled and content		

*This table has been adapted from the Personal Health Inventory, developed by the US Department of Veteran's Affairs "Whole Health for Life" Program. Learn more at: <https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/>*

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Establish Goals...continued:

	Where I am now	Where I want to be
<b>Stress management:</b> Maintaining a low level of overall stress; Ability to identify stressors and manage stress alone or with the help of a professional		
<b>Support:</b> Feeling connected to others; Nurturing and being nurtured by meaningful relationships; Knowing you can rely on others; Not feeling isolated or lonely		
<b>Spirituality:</b> Maintaining a sense of purpose and meaning; Feeling connected to the earth and humanity		
<b>Professional health care:</b> Establishing relationships with Western and complementary health care practitioners; Adhering to treatment regimens; Prioritizing preventative health practices		

3) Now that you’ve taken an inventory of the different areas of health in your life, are there any areas you might want to work on? Record them here:

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Contemplate Change

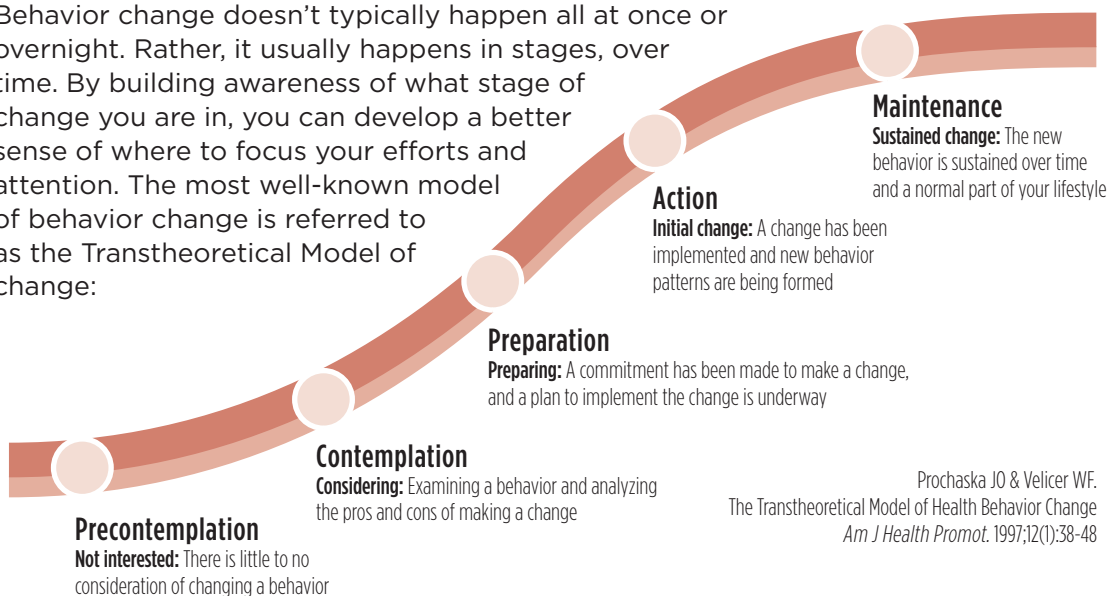
You've thought about your goals, but often times, when it comes to taking the first step in making changes...we hesitate. To proactively take control of all aspects of your health care when faced with a chronic health condition, change is necessary.

The downside is that change can be hard, and uncomfortable, and often even scary.

## Start Small

You don't need to make big, overwhelming changes to improve your health. Start with small, manageable steps that you will be more likely to follow and enjoy. You may very soon find out that even small changes to your health plan can make a big difference in how you feel. And by taking more small steps to improve your holistic health, you'll increase your confidence in your ability to make even more changes and keep moving forward. You DO have control on this journey.

Behavior change doesn't typically happen all at once or overnight. Rather, it usually happens in stages, over time. By building awareness of what stage of change you are in, you can develop a better sense of where to focus your efforts and attention. The most well-known model of behavior change is referred to as the Transtheoretical Model of change:



Identify one behavior in your life that falls in the 'Contemplation' stage, and then complete the following decisional balance chart with it in mind. Evaluate the pros and cons you listed in each box. What do they say about your motivation to change?

NO BEHAVIOR CHANGE	MAKE A BEHAVIOR CHANGE
PROS	CONS
CONS	PROS

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Contemplating Change

Identifying the discrepancies between where we are now and where we want to be is an initial and important step in getting motivated to make change. Revisit and reflect upon your ultimate motivation to heal. Then, take some time to answer the following questions:

Are your current behaviors and actions supportive of your motivation?

What specific actions, behaviors, or thoughts do you currently practice that you view as being supportive of your motivation?

Which specific actions, behaviors or thoughts do you currently practice that may not be supportive of your motivation?

If you don't make any changes to your existing thoughts, behaviors, actions, or health care plan, how confident are you that you will realize your ultimate motivation?

If you don't make any changes to your existing thoughts, behaviors, actions, or health care plan, what might your life look like 5 years down the road? 10? 20?

*I spend my day trying to convince people to stop killing themselves, most people fight me all the way.*

— Rob Gleser, MD

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

## Commit to Setting the Table

Why aim for average outcomes, when you could aim for the extraordinary? Take control of the journey ahead by setting the table for success! ‘Setting the table’ means, for a patient, enhancing the effectiveness of treatments by getting in the best possible health prior to starting treatment and maintaining that level of health once treatment has begun. It involves **1)** pursuing the best of evidence-based medicine with a great medical team, AND **2)** nurturing your whole self by taking a holistic, proactive approach to your own health care.

Setting the table by getting and keeping as healthy as possible gives you the best chance to achieve wellness, both today and in the future. How?

- 1) Getting the most out of your medical treatments.** Treatments can be their most effective and well tolerated when the body is as healthy as possible to start with.
- 2) Shifting the natural progression of disease.** Lifestyle modifications, stress management, integrative therapies, and other aspects of health can all play a role in halting or delaying disease progression and promoting healing.
- 3) Preventing the onset of other chronic health conditions.** Forty percent of Americans have at least two chronic diseases. By preventing the onset of a new chronic health condition, you are giving yourself the best chance of healing from what already burdens you and setting the stage for optimal health in the future.
- 4) Giving YOU control in the healing process.** Your future is not set in stone; you are not powerless. By proactively setting the table for success, you are regaining control in your future and the outcomes you can hope to achieve.

*If we did all the things we are capable of,  
we would literally astound ourselves.*

— Henry David Thoreau

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Setting the Table

We don't have control over everything, but we always have control over something. What might setting the table look like for you? Reflect on the below list of integrative health care practices: which areas do you have some control over? Can you add your own? Can you commit to 'setting the table' by addressing one or more of the aspects below?

	I have some control over this aspect of my health care	I commit to addressing this aspect of my health care
My adherence to my medications/treatments		
The time and effort I put into preparing for my medical appointments		
The medical tests and diagnostics I receive, request, and keep record of		
The inclusion of complementary healthcare practitioners and practices in my health care		
The food and drink I consume		
The supplements and vitamins I introduce to my body		
The amount of physical activity I incorporate into my daily life		
The types of exercise I practice		
The amount of times and ways I practice being mindful		
My ability to appreciate the small things in life		
The ways I share my time and talents with others		
The frequency with which I show gratitude to others		



# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY



## Setting the Table...continued:

	I have some control over this aspect of my health care	I commit to addressing this aspect of my health care
My willingness to practice forgiveness		
Learning about and practicing stress management techniques		
Seeking professional guidance or therapy for my mental and emotional health		
My willingness to ask others for help		
The amount of time I spend with the people I care most about		
The amount of time and ways I connect with the earth		
The ways that I nourish my spiritual health		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

# STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

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*On the journey ahead...*

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Let Your Motivation INSPIRE You

Let Your Goals GUIDE You

...and Let Your Choices  
MOVE You Along

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*Healing is possible.*  
**How you achieve it is up to you.**

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# HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

## Gain knowledge and gain control.

The following section of **MY CHOICES** introduces you to eight areas of health care, contained in the Integrative Health Ribbon to incorporate in your own health care plan to set the table for health and promote healing. To be an ambassador for your own health, it's important that you take the time to learn about your chronic health condition(s) and the health care options available to you. You don't need to have any sort of formal scientific education to improve your understanding of your medical condition(s) and how they are treated, just a willingness to learn and someone to point you in the right direction. There are plenty of tools and resources available to help you get started on this journey of discovery and assist you along the way. Information about your health can help you navigate the road ahead in many ways.

- ◆ You can go into your health care appointments as an active participant, prepared with important questions, which might lead your care in new directions.
- ◆ You will be able to better explain your health situation to family and friends.
- ◆ You may find that more information helps you to stop worrying about the unknown and find peace.
- ◆ Lastly, information empowers. By arming yourself with information, you can gain control over the decision that lie ahead.



Knowledge is important when it comes to management and recovery from a chronic health condition. However, there is a tipping point when information hurts more than it helps. Too much or the wrong kind of information has the power to overwhelm and cause feelings of anxiety and depression, especially if you have been newly diagnosed. Protect your mental and emotional health: if the amount or content of the information you are finding is causing you to become stressed, anxious, or depressed: step away. Take part in an activity that brings you joy and peace. Remember, you are the same person you were before your diagnosis; a diagnosis does not define you, nor will the information you find online shape who you become. Keeping a positive attitude and supporting your mental health is just as important – if not more so – than being informed on every aspect of your health.

*There is one consolation in being sick; and that is the possibility that you may recover to a better state than you were ever in before.*

— Henry David Thoreau

# HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

## Tips for Evaluating Online Health Information

Information empowers, but finding trustworthy information – especially online – can be challenging and frustrating. The amount of information can be overwhelming, and it is often difficult to figure out what is real. It is important to maintain a healthy amount of skepticism and critical eye as you conduct your research. Here are five quick questions to ask yourself when evaluating the content of a health website, provided by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH):

**Who?** Who runs the Web site? Can you trust them?

**What?** What does the site say? Do its claims seem too good to be true?

**When?** When was the information posted or reviewed? Is it up-to-date?

**Where?** Where did the information come from? Is it based on scientific research?

**Why?** Why does the site exist? Is it selling something?



**www.trustortrash.org** is an online, interactive tool for evaluating websites and health information found online. Bookmark this site, and pull it up when you need help determining whether online information is credible.

Start your research by visiting our web site [www.CaringAmbassadors.org](http://www.CaringAmbassadors.org) for more information on performing and evaluating medical research, as well as links to credible evidence based information.

# HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

## Build Your Health Care Team



*Most people spend more time looking for their next car than they do looking for their doctor.*

— Cleveland Clinic

One of the most important and proactive steps that you can take in your health care journey is assembling a health care team that will nourish and support all aspects of your health – with you at the center. It's easy to consider your health care team complete once you've established a relationship with a primary care provider and/or specialty physician, but Western medical professionals alone are not equipped to address all aspects of their patients' health (even if they wanted to, they would never have the time). Explore the table on the following page to familiarize yourself with some of the types of providers/practitioners that support holistic health. Then, answer the below questions to help you identify your health and wellness priorities and the professionals who can help you address them.

- ◆ Which aspect(s) of my health care do I need or want to address?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ What professionals or expert practitioners exist to help me address these health care needs?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ◆ How do I locate them? What are the organizations that credential this type of provider/practitioner? (Refer to the 'Tools & Resources' section in the back of this planner for a list of web directories to help you find this information.)

# HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

## Build an Integrative Health Care Team

Just as doctors and nurses support our physical health with Western medicine, a wide range of professionals are available to support other areas of our health care. Refer to this table for some examples.

### Western Medicine

- Primary care provider
- Specialty physician
- OB/GYN
- Pharmacist
- Dentist
- Nurse practitioner
- Physician assistant
- Psychiatrist

### Complementary Medicine

- Naturopathic Doctor (ND)
- Doctor of Oriental Medicine (OMD)
- Doctor of Chiropractic Medicine (DC)
- Ayurvedic Doctor (AD) or Practitioner (AP)
- Licensed massage therapist
- Licensed acupuncturist

### Support System

- Social worker
- Case manager
- In-home health aide
- Support group leader
- Patient navigator

### Spirituality

- Spiritual or religious leader
- Mentor or life coach

### Nutrition

- Registered Dietician (RD)
- Certified Nutrition Specialist (CNS)

### Well-being

- Therapist, counselor, or psychologist (mental, emotional, or behavioral health)
- Arts therapist (dance, art, music therapy)
- Occupational therapist
- Social worker
- Case manager

“Well-being” is a broad term that means different things to different people; a variety of professionals or practitioners may contribute to one’s overall well-being by enhancing quality of life, health or outlook.

### Stress Management

- Therapist
- Social worker
- Counselor
- Meditative movement (Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Yoga) instructor
- Licensed acupuncturist
- Licensed massage therapist

### Exercise

- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Exercise instructor (Yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Swimming, etc...)
- Personal trainer

# HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

## Choosing a Health Care Provider/Practitioner

There are several factors to consider when choosing a health care provider/practitioner. Here are just a few:

- ◆ Are they covered by your insurance or health care plan? Will they accept your health care plan?
- ◆ Is their office conveniently located and easy to access?
- ◆ Which hospital (if any) do they work with? Is the hospital covered by your insurance?
- ◆ How can you communicate with them outside of appointment times? What is their availability?
- ◆ What is their experience treating others with the same chronic health condition(s) as you? Can they provide you with any results or outcomes?
- ◆ Is the provider/practitioner board certified or licensed in their field?
- ◆ Do they use language you can understand and take time to listen to your concerns and answer your questions? What is their communication style?
- ◆ What is their treatment style? Do they like to tackle conditions like yours head-on, or do they typically take a more conservative 'wait and see' approach?
- ◆ Will the provider support integrative treatment approaches, such as complementary therapies and lifestyle modifications, for the management of your chronic health condition?
- ◆ If a complementary health care practitioner, will they support your Western medicine treatment approaches and preferences?

**Putting together a health care team can be an overwhelming process. Don't worry so much about finding the 'best' health care professionals; instead focus on finding the providers/practitioners who are best for you!**



# WESTERN MEDICINE

## What is it?

Western Medicine, also known as allopathic, conventional, or traditional medicine, is what most people in the U.S. think of when they hear 'health care'. It is the most common form of health care in the United States and includes the care you receive from medical doctors and other health professionals in medical settings like a hospital or doctor's office. Chances are, if you are living with a chronic health condition, you received your diagnosis from a Western medical doctor (MD). The goal of Western medical doctors in treating people with a chronic disease is to:

Diagnose the disease

Stop disease progression

Relieve the symptoms associated with the disease

Prevent the spread of the disease

Cure the disease (if a cure is available)

Improve quality of life

## Why is Western medicine important?

Advancements in Western medicine have contributed greatly to the quality of life and longevity of millions throughout the 20th and 21st century. Today, Western medicine treatments and approaches can improve health outcomes and life spans in ways never imagined even a decade or two ago. Sophisticated diagnostics are allowing doctors to diagnose diseases early – sometimes before they even produce clinical symptoms – allowing patients to take advantage of treatments and lifestyle modifications that may slow, halt, or cure disease early on. Medical treatments are also advancing at a rapid pace. Targeted cancer therapies, stem cell transplants, antiretroviral therapies, biopharmaceuticals, minimally invasive surgeries, advanced imaging techniques, health information technology: these innovations and so many others have offered hope, healing, and life where options were once limited.

New medical discoveries and treatments emerge every day – the longer you can keep yourself as healthy as possible, the more likely you are to benefit from them.

*Leverage the most effective therapies that science and medicine have to offer by pursuing the best of Western medicine throughout your health care journey.*



# WESTERN MEDICINE

## How does it work?

Most Western medicine physicians make decisions about which treatment will be best for their patients based on the best available evidence combined with their clinical experience and an assessment of the patient. This approach is known as evidence-based medicine. Evidence-based treatment plans may include prescription medication, surgery, infusions, and other conventional procedures and therapies. Understanding the connection between lifestyle and physical health, Western medicine providers are more commonly encouraging lifestyle modifications – especially diet and exercise – for many Americans burdened by chronic health conditions.

## Clinical trials in Western medicine

Clinical research trials are considered the “gold standard” in Western medical research and are used by clinicians to inform evidence-based treatment plans. These trials are controlled research studies that are used to help determine if a treatment intervention (e.g., drugs, surgeries, medical devices, behavioral interventions) is effective and safe. Clinical trials add to the medical knowledge related to disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. They are the first step in medical advances and innovations.

Clinical trials offer hope to current and future patients facing serious medical challenges, and participating in a clinical trial may also benefit the study participants, providing them with novel treatment options not otherwise available. However, potential benefits always need to be weighed with the risks; although clinical trials are closely controlled and monitored, serious side effects or harms to the study participants are possible. Participation in a clinical trial is a decision that should be taken seriously and discussed with your doctor and other trusted members of your health care and support teams. For more information on clinical trials, refer to the Western Medicine resources section in the back of this planner.

## Western medicine excels in diagnostics

Western medicine doctors play a key role in diagnosing, monitoring, and assessing disease state and progression by using diagnostics, such as laboratory tests and imaging scans. These tests are vitally important throughout your journey, providing objective, biological data on changes in disease state. Results of these diagnostic tests may help you to understand what is working (and what isn't) in your health care plan and contribute to informed decision making on both you and your provider's parts. Regardless of any other components you choose to include in your health care plan, you are encouraged to use the best tests and diagnostics that Western medicine has to offer.

***In general, laboratory test results must be interpreted in the context of the overall health of the patient and are considered along with the results of other examinations, tests, and procedures. A doctor who is familiar with a patient's medical history and current situation is the best person to explain test results and what they mean.***

— National Cancer Institute

# WESTERN MEDICINE

## Treatment Considerations

You may want to ask your doctor some of the following questions when making decisions about your Western medicine treatment options.

- ◆ What are the ways to treat my chronic health condition?
- ◆ What are the benefits and risks of each of these treatments?
- ◆ Is a 'wait-and-see' approach (as opposed to treatment) appropriate/safe at this time?
- ◆ What treatment do you recommend? Why do you think it is best for me?
- ◆ Can you provide me with evidence or research about this treatment?
- ◆ When will I need to start treatment?
- ◆ Will I need to be in the hospital for treatment? If so, for how long?
- ◆ What is my chance of successfully managing my condition with this treatment?
- ◆ How will we know if the treatment is working?
- ◆ Would a clinical trial (research study) be right for me?
- ◆ Will you help me find a doctor to give me another opinion on the best treatment plan for me?
- ◆ Will you help me find a social worker/patient navigator to help guide me through treatment?
- ◆ Will I have a case manager to help with insurance questions?



Ask your doctor what patients can do to enhance treatment effectiveness. What characteristics or habits has your doctor observed or researched that effect the patient's health or improve treatment results?

# WESTERN MEDICINE

## What are my options?

Diagnostic options to assess & track my chronic health condition & overall health:

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Pharmacological treatment options | Prescription medications:

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Over-the-counter symptom relief options:

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Surgical options:

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Rehabilitation options:

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Clinical trial options:

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# MY CHOICES: WESTERN MEDICINE



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.*

— Charles Darwin



*Research estimates that roughly half of the 7½ years of increased life expectancy since the mid-nineteen hundreds and even a greater number of years of relief from pain and physical and mental dysfunction can be attributed to medical care.*

Bunker J.P. (2001). The role of medical care in contributing to health improvements within societies. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 30(6):1260-1263.



*The limits of the possible can only be defined by going beyond them into the impossible.*

— Arthur C. Clarke



# COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

Complementary Medicine’ is a term describing health care approaches that are not part of the traditional Western medicine system, but are used together with it. Complementary therapies are the individual practices included within the complementary medicine model. They are practiced around the world and are often rooted in alternative medical systems, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, and Naturopathy. Complementary medicine therapies can be used together with Western medicine to enhance treatment effectiveness, relieve symptoms and treatment side effects, and improve well-being and quality of life. These therapies generally fall into the following categories:

Complementary Therapy Type	Examples	Potential Benefits
Mind-Body	Meditation Guided Imagery Progressive relaxation Hypnosis Yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong Aromatherapy Support groups Prayer	Reduce pain, anxiety, and depression; relieve stress; improve cognitive performance; enhance emotional well-being and awareness
Body Manipulation	Chiropractic Massage Reflexology	Reduce tension, stress, anxiety and pain (including back, neck, head, fibromyalgia); complement cancer treatment; treat musculoskeletal injuries
Nutrition and Supplementation	Diet Supplementation (vitamins, minerals, herbs and botanicals)	Maintain and enhance health; prevent disease; promote weight loss; reduce inflammation; optimize cellular and body functions
Exercise	Aerobic Strength training Yoga Tai Chi Qi Gong	Increase longevity; promote weight loss and maintenance; improve cardiovascular health; prevent disease; strengthen bones and muscles; improve mood and mental and emotional health; improve balance; reduce fall risk; improve mobility

# COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

Complementary Therapy Type	Examples	Potential Benefits
Energy Therapies	Acupuncture Reiki Therapeutic touch Biofeedback therapy	Reduce pain; improve ability to cope; heighten self-awareness; Improve mood; Relieve tension; reduce stress and anxiety; promote self-healing
Creative Therapies	Art therapy Music therapy Dance therapy	Improve self-awareness and promote self-healing; decrease depression and anxiety; promote movement

*The integrative approach utilizes all appropriate, evidence-based and personalized therapeutic approaches to achieve optimal health and well-being across one’s lifespan.*


— The Bravewell Collaborative

We encourage you to visit the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health’s A-Z Health Library online for an evidence-based overview of many of the most popular complementary therapies. Although stronger scientific evidence exists for some complementary therapies than others, many complementary therapies have the potential to improve overall well-being and quality of life in ways we don’t yet understand.

When considering adding complementary therapies to your health care plan:

- ◆ Perform your research on the therapy using reputable sources
- ◆ Use a licensed or credentialed practitioner
- ◆ Set up an initial consultation with the practitioner to explore if the therapy is right for you
- ◆ Tell your Western medicine doctor about the complementary therapy you want to use, and make sure it won’t interfere with your medical treatments

For a list of reputable sources of information on complementary medicine and therapies, refer to the Tools & Resources section in the back of this planner.

 **A 2011 trial found that conventional and Ayurvedic treatments for rheumatoid arthritis had similar effectiveness.**

Furst D.E., Venkatraman M.M., McGann M, et al. (2011). Double-blind, randomized, controlled, pilot study comparing classic Ayurvedic medicine, methotrexate, and their combination in rheumatoid arthritis. *Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, 17(4):185-92.



# COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

## Treatment Considerations

When considering complementary therapies, do your research. Here are some questions to ask before adding complementary therapies to your health care plan:

- ◆ Is the practitioner who would be administering the therapy licensed or credentialed in their area of practice? By whom?
- ◆ What are all the possible side effects of the treatment?
- ◆ Are there results or data demonstrating the treatment's effectiveness? Are peer-reviewed published results available?
- ◆ How long has the treatment been used in patients with your chronic health condition?
- ◆ Can you locate other treatment users who would be willing to talk about their experience?
- ◆ Is the treatment included in the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health's online A-Z Library? What does the science say?
- ◆ Could this treatment interfere with your Western medical treatments?
- ◆ Is the treatment covered by insurance or your health care plan?
- ◆ What is the expected out-of-pocket cost?

# COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE



## Complementary Therapies

- ◆ Which complementary therapies am I interested in adding to my health care plan?
- ◆ Why am I interested in using complementary therapies?
- ◆ What do I hope to achieve by using complementary therapies?
- ◆ What questions do I have about complementary therapies?
- ◆ What resources could I use to find answers to my questions?



*Massage can increase health-related quality of life while decreasing pain, nausea, fatigue, anxiety and stress in cancer patients.*

American Massage Therapy Association

# MY CHOICES: COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE



**What I want to do**

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**What I might want to do later**

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**What I don't want to do**

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*Modern medicine, for all its advances, knows less than 10 percent of what the body knows instinctively.*

— Deepak Chopra



***Several studies have shown that acupuncture can help patients manage a variety of pain conditions.***

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health:  
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/introduction>



***A comprehensive meta-analysis concluded that mind-body therapies including tai chi, meditation, and yoga reduce inflammation in the body.***

Morgan N., Irwin M.R., Chung M., Wang C. (2014). The effects of mind-body therapies on the immune system: meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 9(7).



# NUTRITION

*No disease that can be treated by diet  
should be treated with any other means.*

— Maimonides

What we eat significantly influences our health – for better or for worse. A healthy, nourishing diet can prevent the onset of many chronic health conditions, slow, halt or reverse the effects of health conditions that have already struck, and contribute to a longer life. Everyone, but especially those with a chronic health condition, should consider making a sound nutrition plan part of their healing process. Three health promotion goals can be achieved by making smart diet and nutrition choices:

- 1) **Achieve optimal weight:** Achieving a healthy weight sets your body up for success when facing a chronic health condition. Importantly, your risk of developing other health conditions related to diet and weight are greatly reduced if you are a healthy body weight. By preventing the onset of additional chronic health conditions, you enhance your opportunities for healing.
- 2) **Promote your personal health and nutritive and dietary needs:** It's not just about how much you eat, what types of food you eat play a significant role in your dietary and nutritive health. Nutrition is increasingly addressed by medical doctors when treating chronic health conditions, and nutrition is often a cornerstone of integrative health plans.

Several well-established diets have been studied by researchers and shown to be effective for improving health outcomes in those with chronic health conditions. Rather than focus on the differences between these diets, which can be confusing and stressful, you may find it helpful to reflect on what they have in common: the diets with the strongest evidence behind them all tend to emphasize eating lots of fruits and vegetables, foods low in saturated fats, and little or no processed or heavily refined foods. Speak to your health care providers (and possibly incorporate a dietitian into your health care team) to determine your personal nutrition needs and develop a dietary plan that will help you tip the scales toward health.

- 3) **Reduce inflammation in the body:** Systemic inflammation (not in response to an acute injury or disease) can impact the body in many damaging ways. It is associated with many chronic diseases, including cancer, autoimmune diseases, diabetes, and Alzheimer's. Inflammation can be caused or worsened by factors like stress or depression, as well as by what we introduce to our bodies, in the form of foods, chemicals, and toxins. Some foods are known to cause inflammation, while others combat it (see the chart on the following page).

# NUTRITION

*Nutrition that is truly beneficial for one chronic disease will support health across the board.*

— T. Colin Campbell, The China Study

## Nutritious Foods for Good Health

The first step toward ensuring you are getting all the nutrients you need is to make the most of what you eat. This means eating a wide variety of whole foods every day, along with plenty of water and other healthy liquids your body needs to function its best. The most nutritious food is usually that which is closest to its natural state. Too much processing, refining, and overcooking can chip away at any food's nutrients. An important and easy way to increase your daily nutrient intake is to go for a variety of color. The more your shopping basket looks like a rainbow, the better your diet will be!

Here are some general rules for healthy, anti-inflammatory eating and sound nutrition:

### INCLUDE:

Fresh or lightly cooked vegetables & fruits  
Raw or lightly toasted nuts & seeds  
Whole grains like brown rice, barley & quinoa  
Whole wheat breads, pastas, cereals & crackers  
Unprocessed legumes like beans, peas & lentils  
Lean protein like poultry & fish  
Healthy fats like olives and olive oil, flaxseeds, walnuts & avocados  
Eggs (in moderation; organic, free range if possible)  
High quality cheese and yogurt (in moderation; organic if possible)  
Plenty of water (still or sparkling, unsweetened)

### AVOID:

Heavily processed foods  
Refined sugar  
Excess red meat & saturated fats like butter  
Fried foods  
Excess alcohol  
Soda/Pop



Reduce your exposure to pesticides and other toxins by buying organic (or growing your own food) when possible. The Environmental Working Group publishes an annual list of the conventional produce with the highest levels of pesticide residue. Prioritize buying organic for the foods on this list (visit [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)).

# NUTRITION

## MICHAEL POLLAN'S RULES FOR HEALTHY EATING

Michael Pollan is a respected journalist, writer, and professor who has spent extensive time researching and writing about the American food system and changing dietary patterns of Americans and the resulting health and environmental impacts. His findings are summed up in his now-famously simple eating recommendation:

*Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.*  
— Michael Pollan

“Eat food” means to eat real, whole foods and to avoid the fake stuff. Here’s how to do it, according to Mr. Pollan:

- ◆ Don’t eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food.
- ◆ Don’t eat anything with more than five ingredients, or ingredients you can’t pronounce.
- ◆ Stay out of the middle of the supermarket; shop on the perimeter of the store, where real food tends to be placed.
- ◆ With few exceptions, don’t eat anything that won’t eventually rot.
- ◆ Always leave the table a little hungry.
- ◆ As often as possible, enjoy meals with the people you love.
- ◆ Don’t buy food where you buy your gasoline.



*Hang these rules on your fridge, for an easy reminder of how to nourish your body with real food.*

Print a copy at <https://caringambassadors.org/healthcare-tools/>



# MY CHOICES: NUTRITION



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition.*

— Thomas Edison



***Intensive, comprehensive lifestyle changes have been shown to significantly reverse some of the effects of cardiovascular disease over a five-year period, when compared to a standard-of-care treatment protocol.***

Ornish D., Scherwitz L.W., Billings J.H., et al. (1998). Intensive lifestyle changes for reversal of coronary heart disease. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, (280)23: 2001-2007.



*He who does not know food, how can he understand the diseases of man?*

— Hippocrates, the father of medicine (460-357 B.C.)



# EXERCISE

*If a pill could give you all benefits of exercise,  
it would be the best pill around.*

— Edward Laskowski, MD  
co-director of Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine

Getting enough exercise is one of the most important things anyone can do to maintain good health. The importance of exercise becomes even more significant when you are living with a chronic health condition, because it can help prevent physical decline and slow disease progression. Take control of your chronic health condition by making exercise a part of your health care plan and prioritizing it in your daily life; the benefits of doing so are too good to ignore! Here are just a few:



## Physical Benefits

- Improves immune function
- Reduces risk of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome, and some cancers
- Reduces blood pressure and cholesterol
- Strengthens bone and muscle
- Decreases physical pain and arthritic symptoms
- Reduces inflammation
- Prevents weight gain
- Improves joint mobility
- Improves balance and reduces fall risk
- Increases your chances of living longer



## Mental Benefits

- Improves cognition and concentration, learning and judgment, especially as you age



## Emotional Benefits

- Improves mood
- Reduces risk of developing depression
- Reduces stress and anxiety



## Quality of Life Benefits

- Improves quality of sleep and fights fatigue
- Improves overall daily living function, like shopping, taking care of your kids, or climbing stairs
- Offers opportunities for socialization through fitness classes and groups and sports or physical activity clubs
- A physically fit body can better tolerate drugs and treatments that can sometimes have substantial side effects

# EXERCISE

The Caring Ambassadors defines ‘exercise’ as any planned physical activity undertaken with the aim of improving physical fitness or health. There are lots of different styles of exercise and many ways to incorporate physical activity into your life without a gym membership. You don’t need to devote a significant amount of time to exercise to benefit from it, either. The average adult needs 2 ½ hours of moderate physical activity per week (think brisk walking) to reap the health benefits of exercise plus a couple of days a week of strength training that works all major muscle groups. And you don’t need to knock all this physical activity out at once: breaking it up into smaller chunks is fine (even ten minutes at a time will do!).

Almost any type of exercise is likely to help you feel better along your journey. Specific types of exercise (e.g., aerobic, low impact, strength training) may be more beneficial or feasible for those with certain health conditions. And some forms of exercise may need to be avoided altogether to maintain your health. Work with your medical providers to develop your optimal exercise plan; bring relevant professionals such as physical therapists and personal trainers to the table as well. Most importantly, make regular physical activity a normal part of your lifestyle by identifying and practicing exercise that you love!

## EXERCISE OPTIONS

### AEROBIC

(at least 2.5 hours/week for health maintenance)

Any activity that gets you breathing harder and your heart rate up:

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Bike Riding
- HIIT (high intensity interval training)
- Most sports (tennis, basketball, soccer, etc...)

### STRENGTH TRAINING

(at least twice a week for health maintenance)

- Weight lifting
- Working with resistance bands
- Body weight resistance (like push-ups or lunges)
- Heavy yard work (such as shoveling/digging)
- Yoga

### LOW IMPACT

- Swimming or water aerobics
- Walking
- Cycling (outdoor or stationary bike)
- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Elliptical machine
- Rowing machine
- Seated exercises

### OUTSIDE THE BOX

- Mowing the lawn
- Gardening
- Canoeing or kayaking
- Dancing
- Cross country skiing
- Roller skating or roller blading
- Vacuuming or cleaning

# EXERCISE

## Keep it Simple, Keep it Enjoyable



Walking is a great low impact aerobic exercise that is good for the body, mind, and spirit. Aim for 10,000 steps a day – a simple pedometer can help you keep track. For an added mood boost, walk outdoors in a natural environment whenever possible.



Not everyone wants to, needs, or can leave their home to exercise. Exercising from the comfort of your own home is an excellent option in this case. There are a few budget-friendly items that it may help to have around, such as an exercise mat, resistance bands, dumbbells, and an exercise ball. There are also plenty of exercises that can be done without equipment, or even from a chair or bed. For inspiration, follow along with exercise videos (many can be found for free on YouTube and Vimeo for all fitness levels). Refer to the Resources pages for more information.



Plenty of research points to the fact that most people are more motivated to exercise when they do so as part of a group or with a partner. Group exercise has the added bonus of being a social activity. Fitness and recreation centers usually offer group classes. For a more informal option, explore local Meetup groups (visit [meetup.com](http://meetup.com)), start a walking group at work, or find a fitness buddy to get active with.



Check out your local YMCA or recreation centers for reasonably-priced options for fitness center memberships, group exercise classes, personal training, and pool memberships.



Want to give biking a spin, but don't own your own bicycle? More and more cities have implemented bike share programs, providing residents with access to bikes (and the convenience and health benefits of biking) without the burden or cost of bike ownership. Visit [www.bikeshare.com](http://www.bikeshare.com) to see if this service is available where you live.



Did you know that some companies will offer fitness center discounts to their employees? Some may also offer incentives for weight loss. Check with your employer's wellness program or HR office to find out what benefits you may be eligible for. Insurance companies will sometimes also provide partial reimbursement or cost incentives for these types of programs.

***And remember, ten minutes of physical activity at a time adds up and can greatly improve your health, outlook and mood!***

# MY CHOICES: EXERCISE



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*Many exercise forms — aerobic, yoga, weights, walking and more — have been shown to benefit mood.*

— Andrew Weil, MD



*There is incontrovertible evidence that regular physical activity contributes to the primary and secondary prevention of several chronic diseases and is associated with a reduced risk of premature death...However, the greatest improvements in health status are seen when people who are least fit become physically active.*

Warburton D.E., Nicol C.W., & Bredin S.S. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: the evidence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 174(6): 801-809.





*Exercise to stimulate, not to annihilate. The world wasn't formed in a day, and neither were we. Set small goals & build upon them.*

— Lee Haney, Eight time Mr. Olympia



# STRESS MANAGEMENT

*Reactions to stress are a well-recognized factor in immune function and can be either health protecting or health damaging. Stress generally suppresses immune function, while relaxation and meditation enhance it.*

— Dean Ornish, MD for the Institute of Medicine's report,  
*Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public*

Stress is a normal emotional and psychological reaction to many things we encounter in our day-to-day lives, but don't underestimate its impact. Chronic, or ongoing, stress can cause very real mental, emotional, and physical problems. Chronic stress can actually depress our immune system, making us more susceptible to health problems. It contributes to anxiety, depression, insomnia, obesity, and heart disease; is linked to mental illness and pain; and is a risk factor for substance abuse.

Living with a challenging health condition can cause additional stress in life. The good news is, by practicing stress management techniques, you can take control of your stress, protecting and improving your overall health and well-being. Successful stress management has been shown to improve a person's ability to cope, health outcomes, sleep, pain, and quality of life. There are numerous stress management techniques you can use to combat stress in life. Following is a brief overview of some of the most widely used.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a mind-body practice that serves to relax and calm users. Meditation creates a sense of focus, awareness, and an openness to promote relaxation and inner-peace. One form of meditation is a focus of the mind. The object of focus can be your breath, a candle flame, a word or a sound. The practice of "transcendental meditation" is an example of this form of meditation, and research has shown it to be an effective practice to address emotional, psychological, and physical problems. Termed "mindfulness", another form of meditation aims to widen users' views and observe the mind's activity through an acknowledgement of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that arise throughout the practice. "Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction" (MBSR) is an example of this practice that is well-researched and widely promoted by professionals and those who practice it.

**Exercise:** Exercise increases your body's endorphins (neurotransmitters that induce feelings of happiness) and further helps to reduce stress by distracting us from the day's worries and improving sleep quality.

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

**Hypnosis and Imagery:** Hypnotic techniques promote a state of relaxation to achieve a desired clinical outcome. The hypnotic state may be self-induced or induced by another.

**Biofeedback:** This practice uses machines or other devices to provide audible, visual, or tactile information about body processes that frequently are under subconscious influence.

**Yoga, Qi Gong, Tai Chi:** These forms of movement therapy are integral parts of the Ayurvedic (type of medicine originating in India) and Oriental medical systems. They involve slow movement combined with controlled breathing.

**Art, Music, and Dance Therapy:** Creative activities provide an outlet for expression of subconscious beliefs or feelings. Once these beliefs are mobilized or brought to a conscious level, they can be modified or used to promote a healing response.

**Forgiveness:** Cited to be a significant force in promoting well-being, the practice of forgiving self and others has special importance to anyone diagnosed with a chronic health condition.

**Breathing Exercises:** Belly breathing, alternate nostril breathing, and other techniques have proven helpful in calming the nervous system and reducing stress.

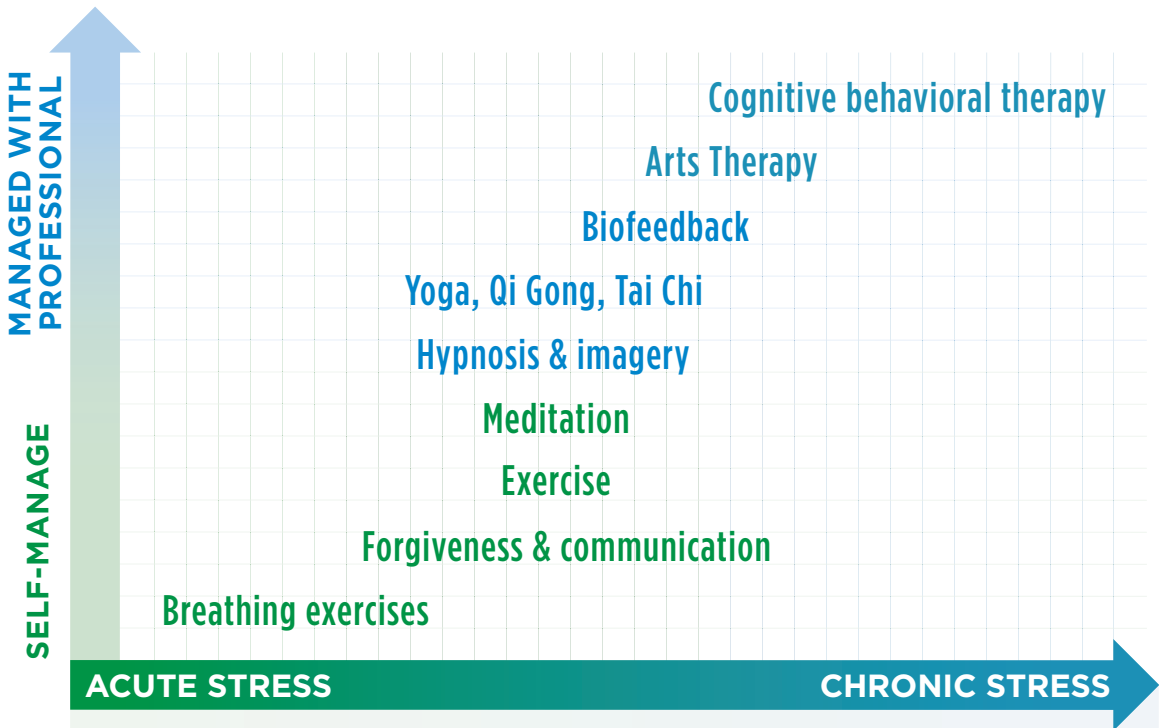
**Cognitive behavioral therapy:** Chronic stress can lead to many health problems, including anxiety, a mental health condition. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is effective in treating anxiety caused by chronic stress and improving quality of life. CBT aims to shift the patient's thoughts and/or behaviors to change negative emotional responses to stressors or stimuli.

*It's always hard to deal with injuries mentally, but I like to think about it as a new beginning. I can't change what happened, so the focus needs to go toward healing and coming back stronger than before.*

— Carli Lloyd

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

Which stress management techniques will work best for you? It might depend on the type of stress you are experiencing and whether you want to take control of it yourself or obtain professional support. This chart includes some of the evidence-based therapies and techniques that help people manage acute and chronic stress. Stress management strategies for dealing with acute stress are located towards the left-hand side of the chart; those that are effective for chronic stress are located toward the right. Self-management strategies are located towards the bottom, while professional management methods are located towards the top of the graph. In general, chronic stress, which may or may not be characterized as anxiety, should be treated by a mental health professional, like a licensed therapist or psychologist.



### Acute vs. chronic stress: What’s the difference?

Acute stress is temporary and usually immediately follows the exposure to the stressor (for example, the stress caused by having a fight with a loved one or having a bad day at work). Chronic stress is stress that persists due to an ongoing stressor (for example, having a poor relationship with a spouse or a toxic work environment). Stress that persists, even after the stressor is gone, is also called anxiety, a condition which often requires treatment by a professional mental health provider.

# STRESS MANAGEMENT



## Addressing Stressors

What are the areas or things in life causing you the most stress (stressors)?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

For each of the above, ask yourself these two questions:

- 1) Is this important to me?
  - 2) Do I have control over this?
- ◆ Try to let go of those stressors you identified as not important. They are causing you unnecessary stress.
  - ◆ For those important stressors that you do have some control over, what can you do to reduce or eliminate the stress? This may involve avoiding the stressor all together, practicing open communication or forgiveness, or changing your behavior.
  - ◆ For those important stressors that you have no control over, reflect on what stress management techniques you can use to cope with the stressor. For chronic stress or anxiety, this may involve seeking out professional support, like a licensed therapist or psychologist.



What would successful stress management look like in your life?  
What benefits might it produce day-to-day? How might it contribute to your healing?

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

## Practice Belly Breathing

Here's something you can do to calm your nervous system, relieve stress, and support your immune system right now:

- 1) Lie face up in bed or another comfortable place.
- 2) Place your hands or a small bag of rice on your belly.
- 3) Inhale through your nose and push your belly out, away from your back. Try to keep your chest as still as possible.
- 4) Exhale through pursed lips, pulling belly towards back.

Repeat these steps 5 to 10 times.

## Practice Progressive Relaxation

We often tense our muscles as a reaction to stress without realizing it. Progressive relaxation helps you to distinguish between the feelings of muscle tension and deep relaxation. It is an effective treatment for reducing muscular tension, anxiety, depression insomnia, pain and high blood pressure.

Here's a quick tutorial on how to do it:

- ◆ Get in a comfortable position, preferably lying down or seated in a chair.
- ◆ Begin to take a few slow, deep breaths.
- ◆ Slowly tense each muscle group for 5 seconds as tightly as you can without causing pain, while keeping the other muscles in your body relaxed.
- ◆ Then completely relax the muscle for 30 seconds. Notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.
- ◆ Repeat this procedure for the following muscles:  
hands; wrists/forearms; biceps/upper arms; shoulders; forehead; cheeks & jaws; mouth; neck; chest; back; stomach; hips & buttocks; thighs; lower legs; toes

Reference and for further reading: *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook, 6th Ed.*

# MY CHOICES: STRESS MANAGEMENT



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*You are braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.*  
— Christopher Robin



***Evidence supports mind-body practices such as Transcendental Meditation as an effective strategy for lowering blood pressure, and meditative techniques have shown to be effective at reducing anxiety.***

Nidich S.L., Rainforth M.V., Haaga D.A. (2009). A randomized controlled trial on effects of the Transcendental Meditation Program on blood pressure, psychological distress, and coping in Young adults. *American Journal of Hypertension*, 22(12): 1326-1331.





*Something as simple as having a support group, a wide social network, or a nurturing belief system helps people manage stress and recover from illness.*

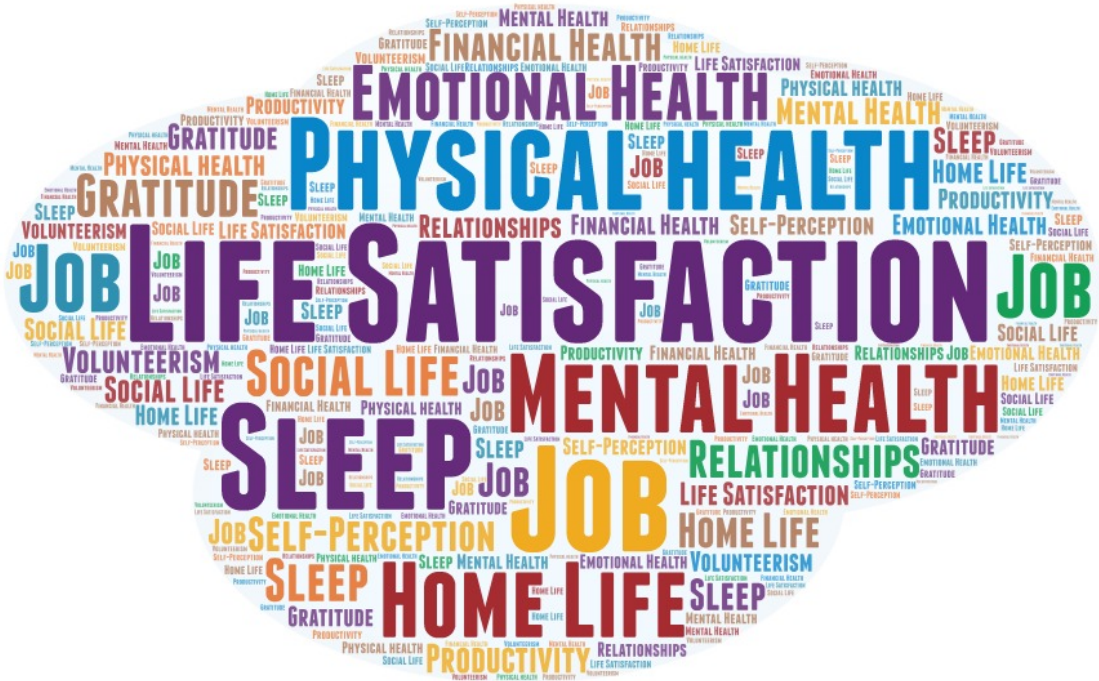
— Institute of Medicine, Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public:  
2009 Summit Summary Report



# WELL-BEING

*Well-being is associated with numerous health-, job-, family-, and economically-related benefits. For example, higher levels of well-being are associated with decreased risk of disease, illness, and injury; better immune functioning; speedier recovery; and increased longevity. Individuals with high levels of well-being are more productive at work and are more likely to contribute to their communities.*

— Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Well-Being Concepts



Well-being is a broad term that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines as judging life positively and feeling good. Almost anything in life can impact a person's sense of well-being; the word cloud above illustrates some of these factors. It is important to recognize that well-being and happiness can be achieved or regained even after major life setbacks, like the diagnosis of a chronic health condition, making well-being an essential part of healing.

Emotional and mental health are important components of well-being. A harmful emotional or mental state can damage our bodies and physical health. Our emotions can impact functions like blood pressure, heart rate, sleep, and digestion, to name a few.

# WELL-BEING

Additionally, negative emotions and poor mental health often manifest themselves in adverse behaviors, such as overeating, excessive alcohol consumption, and drug use, which are obviously counterproductive to the healing process. Mental health disorders like depression and anxiety are more common among people with chronic health conditions. They are also associated with poorer physical health, disease progression, and mortality, so it's especially important for anyone facing a chronic health condition to address mental and emotional health in their health care plan.

On the other hand, a healthy emotional and mental state may manifest itself in not only a positive mood, but in better physical functioning, both of which contribute to improved quality of life and well-being. The health-related benefits of well-being include disease prevention, faster recovery times, better immune functioning, and even a longer life.

While there is no single recipe for creating well-being, happiness researchers (they exist!) at the University of Wisconsin have identified four core well-being 'ingredients'. They are:

## Awareness

Put simply: being present in the moment and not letting our minds wander. Research concludes that when people live in the present moment, they are happier.

## Connection

The connection component is our emotional ability to have successful relationships with others. Having meaningful relationships with others substantially contributes to a sense of well-being. Relationships are rooted in and flourish based on emotional attributes like appreciation, gratitude, kindness, and compassion.

## Insight

An understanding of how our own self works - basically, the story we tell ourselves about...ourselves. A healthy self-narrative begins with the belief that we are flexible, evolving beings who can adapt to change and are capable of happiness, despite setbacks. This belief promotes resilience, which is especially important when facing a chronic health condition.

## Purpose

A bounty of research points to having a sense of purpose as being a significant contributor to well-being and happiness. Purpose can also be thought of as what inspires us, what we live for, or our ultimate motivation in life. By reflecting and focusing on your purpose, and aligning it with your daily behavior, you can nurture your own sense of well-being.

# WELL-BEING

You can strengthen awareness, connection, insight, and purpose in your daily life by practicing well-being promoting behaviors, such as:

**Mindfulness:** Often, the cause of negative feelings is related to an event from the past or worry about the future. Practices such as yoga and meditation help us to slow down and focus on the present to establish inner peace and calm the nervous system. These practices have been shown to make people feel better mentally, emotionally and physically.

**Forgiveness and gratitude:** A negative mindset is self-defeating. By focusing on what you are grateful for, small as it may be, and by embracing the practice of forgiveness, you can create a positive mental space and improve emotional well-being.

**Volunteering and helping others:** The diagnosis of a chronic health condition can damage a sense of purpose. By helping others, you can regain a sense of purpose and become a source of positive change, which will have very real effects on your emotions and outlook.

**Social connection:** Maintaining and nurturing personal connections with others can improve mood, decrease the risk of developing depression, and in a way that is not entirely understood by researchers, can result in positive health outcomes and increased longevity. The power of relationships is real and strong. To improve overall well-being, make relationships and social connections a priority.

**Therapy:** You don't have to tackle negative emotions and mental health alone. A licensed therapist or psychologist can help you reframe your mental state and emotional responses.

## Resilience and Well-being

Resilience is what helps us to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. In the simplest of terms, it means our ability to bounce back from challenging situations to regain or find a new state of well-being and contentment. Research has found several factors that are associated with resilience:

- ◆ The ability to make realistic plans and take the necessary steps to carry them out
- ◆ A positive self-image; confidence in your strengths and abilities
- ◆ Communication and problem-solving skills
- ◆ Impulse control and the ability to manage strong emotions

# WELL-BEING

Building resilience is an ongoing process. Here are some strategies to help you along the way:

- ◆ Make connections and nurture relationships
- ◆ Don't view any challenge as impossible
- ◆ Accept change as part of life
- ◆ Develop realistic, bite-sized goals
- ◆ Take decisive actions
- ◆ View challenges as an opportunity for self-discovery
- ◆ View yourself in a positive light
- ◆ Maintain perspective
- ◆ Have a hopeful outlook
- ◆ Practice self-care

*The above content is adapted from The Road to Resilience Guide (American Psychological Association). Available at: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>*



***Several research studies have illustrated humankind's ability to adapt after adversity. For example, a research study examining the self-reported happiness of recent paraplegics showed that, although the study participants were severely depressed immediately following their disability, two years later their self-reported levels of happiness were similar to that of the control group.***

Brickman P., Coates D., & Janoff-Bulman R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims: is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36(8):917-927.



When is a time I have shown resilience in the past? What helped me bounce back in that difficult situation? What did I learn about myself through that experience? How can that experience and the lessons learned be applied to my healing journey?

***I laughed more in the hospital than I ever have in my life, making fun of all the weird things that were happening to me.***

— Christina Applegate, breast cancer survivor

# MY CHOICES: WELL-BEING



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*Wellness seeks more than the absence of illness; it searches for new levels of excellence. Beyond any disease-free neutral point, wellness dedicates its efforts to our total well-being - in mind, body, and spirit.*

— Greg Anderson



*The illnesses of loneliness, depression, anger and hostility can be devastating to a person's health.*

— The Bravewell Collaborative



*Courage doesn't always roar, sometimes it's the quiet voice at the end of the day whispering, I will try again tomorrow.*

— Mary Anne Radmacher





# SUPPORT SYSTEM

What is the difference between illness and wellness?

## ILLNESS WELLNESS

*“Healing occurs when we move from the loneliness, isolation, and depression of the I toward the sense of support, connection, and community of the we.”*  
— Dean Ornish, MD

Having supportive relationships is a strong predictor of well-being and increased quality of life. The effects of this impact aren't just emotional; people with a strong support system also enjoy better health outcomes and reduced disease burden. In fact, having strong relationships helps us to live longer! Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: isolation and loneliness lead not only to depression, but also to poor health outcomes.

No one needs to face a chronic health condition alone. When people with a chronic health condition seek and receive help from others, they often find it easier to cope. Developing and nurturing strong relationships is one of the most important steps in healing, and it's something you can work on right now to immediately benefit your health and well-being.



What are my most meaningful relationships in life?  
What about these relationships is important to me?  
What do I contribute to these relationships?

# SUPPORT SYSTEM



## Build a Support Team

No one needs to face a chronic health condition alone. When people with health challenges seek and receive help from others, they often find it easier to cope.

### Step 1: IDENTIFY RESOURCES

In the boxes below, make a list of all the people or organizations that may be able to offer you support in some way.

FAMILY MEMBERS	FRIENDS	NEIGHBORS
COLLEAGUES	COMMUNITY/RELIGIOUS GROUP	CLUB/TEAM
HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS/ PRACTITIONERS	SUPPORT GROUPS	ORGANIZATIONS
OTHER		

*Meaningful relationships don't need to be limited to those in your personal network; disease-specific support groups, online communities, group classes, and community groups can all be sources of support and inspiration on your journey.*

# SUPPORT SYSTEM



## Build a Support Team... continued...

### Step 2: BUILD SUPPORT

The people you listed on the previous page can offer you support in many ways, but they may wait for you to give them hints or ideas about what to do. Take advantage of the unique talents, perspectives, and traits represented by those on your list. In the left-hand column below, record your health care needs (e.g., rides to appointments, socialization). Then, take some time to review your list (or add to it), and in the column on the right, record which person or people from your list could fill each role.

#### HEALTH CARE NEED


#### POSSIBLE SUPPORT PERSON


### Step 3: TAKE ACTION!

Reach out to those on your list. Tell them that you'd like for them to be a member of your support team. Then, explain why you value their involvement and how specifically they can help.

## SUPPORT SYSTEM

## Step 4: PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Congratulations! You've assembled a strong support team that is going to hold you up on your healing journey. Fill in the following "My Support Team" chart to bring it all together, and help you keep track of who will be there for you along the way.

[illegible]

# MY CHOICES: SUPPORT SYSTEM



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*“Having a superpower has nothing to do with the ability to fly or jump, or superhuman strength. The truest superpowers are the ones we all possess: willpower, integrity, and most importantly, courage.”*  
— Jason Reynolds



*Having supportive relationships is one of the strongest predictors of well-being, having a notably positive effect.*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Well-Being Concepts  
[www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm)



***A meta-analytic review found that people with strong relationships are half as likely to die prematurely as those without strong relationships.***

Holt-Lunstad J., Smith T.B., Layton J.B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7).



# SPIRITUALITY

*Life is full of happiness and tears; be strong and have faith.*

— Kareena Kapoor Khan

For thousands of years, spiritual practices have been an integral part of worldwide healing traditions. When discussing spirituality, frequently the concepts of religion and prayer come to mind. Not all people take part in an organized religion or believe in prayer, but that doesn't mean that spirituality is not, or shouldn't be, a part of their life and self-care. So for our purposes, spirituality is simply defined as the unique connection between you and what you define as your source of healing. A spiritual practice may promote meaning or purpose in your life, a sense of connectedness, your personal values, religion-specific beliefs, or the belief that being human means more than just your physical existence on earth. There are countless ways that the practice of spirituality may enter your daily life. Examples include spending time in nature, being of service to others, attending a religious service or prayer group, reading poetry or books that inspire you, communicating with ancestors, meditating, or choosing to practice harmlessness.

Each person has his or her own spiritual journey—the type of journey one practices is less important than the fact that it works for you and allows you to continue growing.



*Religious involvement and spirituality are associated with living longer, better health outcomes and better coping skills when faced with a serious illness, as well as better quality of life.*

Mueller P.S., Plevak D.J., Rummans T.A. (2001). Religious involvement, spirituality, and medicine: implications for clinical practice. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. (76):1225-1235.



# SPIRITUALITY

Why should you consider nurturing your spiritual side as part of your healing journey? Consider reviews of the evidence that examine the association between religion, spirituality, health outcomes, and quality of life and find that religious involvement/spirituality are associated with:

- ◆ Increased lifespan
- ◆ Reduced mortality
- ◆ Less cardiovascular disease and hypertension; lower blood pressure
- ◆ Increased health promoting behaviors
- ◆ Fewer hospitalizations and shorter hospital stays
- ◆ Less or reduced depression and anxiety
- ◆ Improved coping when faced with illness
- ◆ Higher health related quality of life

How does spirituality impact health? Science can't provide a definitive answer. What we do know is that religion and spirituality tend to involve social connectedness and community, which are beneficial to our health. Being religiously involved is also associated with practicing health promoting behaviors like exercise, healthy eating, and less substance use. Spiritual practices such as meditation, journaling, and prayer can also illicit positive emotions, which can have positive physiological impacts, such as decreased blood pressure and heart rate. However, there are health benefits to religion and spirituality that extend beyond what is known. Believing that a connection between spirituality and healing exists is more important than understanding why the connection exists.

# SPIRITUALITY



## Self-Reflection

- ◆ What practices do I engage in that provide me with purpose or meaning?
- ◆ What practices do I engage in that make me feel connected to others?  
To the earth?
- ◆ What practices do I engage in that reflect my values?
- ◆ How do these practices impact my feelings and beliefs? How do my feelings and beliefs impact these practices?
- ◆ How can I continue to nurture my spiritual work throughout my healing? And what do I need from others (including my health care providers) to support me in this?

# MY CHOICES: SPIRITUALITY



What I want to do

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What I might want to do later

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What I don't want to do

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*A 2012 systematic review examining religion, spirituality, and health found, “A large volume of research shows that people who are more R/S [religious/spiritual] have better mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems compared to those who are less R/S...The research findings, a desire to provide high-quality care, and simply common sense, all underscore the need to integrate spirituality into patient care.”*

Koenig H.G. (2012). Religion, spirituality, and health: the research and clinical implications. *ISRN Psychiatry*, 2012 Issue.



## ACT



This action-oriented section of **MY CHOICES** is intended to help you create a personalized, integrative health care plan and to take the steps to achieve your health goals and optimize healing.



# I HAVE A PLAN!

### Make a Plan

Now it's time to put all your health care choices together in a personalized, integrative health plan. This plan should incorporate the treatments, practices, and approaches you've identified as wanting to explore NOW from each of the eight health care areas.

#### Step One:

Revisit your '**MY CHOICES**' worksheets for each of the eight 'Health Care Options' in this planner



#### Step Two:

List all the things you wrote down in the "What I want to do NOW" sections on the following '**MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan©**' worksheet, next to the corresponding health care section. Consider these your current health care goals and priorities.



**This plan is meant to help you focus, keep you on track, and provide you with an overview of the health care choices YOU have prioritized to pursue. This plan is not meant to be tackled all at once, and it should be updated to reflect new health care goals, therapies, and approaches. The following 'Start Action Planning' section will help you to develop action plans to achieve the goals identified on your 'MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan©' worksheet.**

*Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life.  
Tip Toe if you must, but take a step.*

— Naeem Callaway

# MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan©

## Western Medicine

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## Complementary Medicine

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## Nutrition

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## Exercise

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## Stress Management

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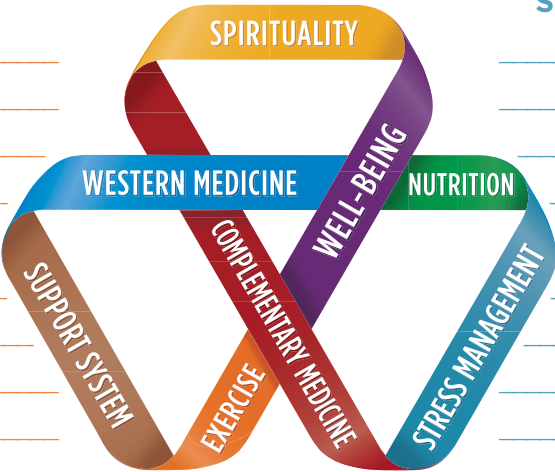
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## Well-being

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## Support System

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## Spirituality

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# ACT

## Start Action Planning

Congratulations on putting together a plan that will address all aspects of your health care needs and get you on the road to healing. At this point, you may be thinking to yourself that your plan looks nice on paper, but the thought of putting it all into action is overwhelming. When faced with a large, intimidating task, it can help to focus on small achievements you can attain step-by-step over time.

## Action Planning 101

Action planning is the process of breaking up larger goals into smaller ‘action plans’. It is an effective strategy for achieving health goals. Action planning will set you up for small victories throughout your journey, which will help you gain the confidence that YOU are in control of your health care journey. This confidence in your abilities – sometimes referred to as self-efficacy – can inspire hope. Never underestimate the power of positive attitude to promote healing, or the impact seemingly small or isolated changes can have on your overall health.

## Where do I start?

Refer to your completed ‘**MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan®**’. Think about the options you’ve listed under each area of health care in your plan as singular goals for healing. Tackling all these goals at the same time is unrealistic, but you can set yourself up for success by choosing one or two of the goals to address at a time, and then developing action plans to achieve them.

To help you make choices about which health care goals to pursue using action planning, answer the following questions:

- 1)** On a scale from 1-10, how **IMPORTANT** is making a change in this area of your health care to you right now?
- 2)** On a scale from 1-10, how **CONFIDENT** are you in making changes in this area?

Which areas of your health care did you answer 7 or above for both importance and confidence? These are likely the areas you should start with to give yourself the best shot at success.

And remember, your goals should guide you toward your ultimate motivation for healing. Through action planning, you can take the steps required to achieve them.

***All you need is the plan, the road map, and the courage to press on to your destination.***

— Earl Nightingale

# ACT

## Draft your Plan

Review the ‘**MY CHOICES Action Plan©**’ on the following page to familiarize yourself with the components of a successful plan. Then, use one of the blank action plans provided in this section to create your own (additional action plans can be downloaded from the Caring Ambassadors website, or just use a blank piece of paper).

We encourage you to break up all your health care goals into smaller, attainable action plans. Celebrate the small victories along the way, and remember that journeys are naturally full of detours and dead-ends; you can always change directions and stop for a rest along the way.



Kickstart your healing by completing six weeks of action plans (included in this section). Track your progress using the tracking and self-assessment tool provided in the Tools and Resources section.

## MY CHOICES Action Plan©: *Examples and Instructions*

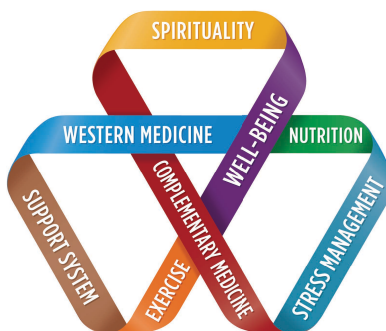
### 1) Start date

Record the date on which you intend to begin this action plan.

**EXAMPLE:** *Monday, January 7, 2019*

### 2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

**EXAMPLE:** *Complementary Medicine*



### 3) Which health care goal does your

action plan address? Refer to “*MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan©*”

**EXAMPLE:** *Try acupuncture*



# ACT

## 4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

What smaller step(s) will you take now to work toward achieving this goal?  
Make sure your action plan is **SMART**:

**Specific** – Pick EXACTLY what you will do to meet your goal.

**Measurable** – Pick goals that are measurable: how will you know if you've met your goal?

**Achievable** – Pick an action that will challenge you (so that you find satisfaction in achieving it), but not one that is so challenging that it's unlikely to be achieved.

**Relevant** – Ensure that the specific steps you take will help you achieve your overall goal.

**Timebound** – Ensure that your plan includes information such as by when? How often? Within what time frame? Hint: Weekly action plans tend to work well.

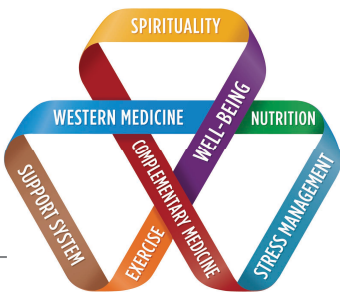
***EXAMPLE: By the end of this week, I will contact my insurance company to find out if acupuncture is a covered service and identify three certified acupuncturists in my area.***

## 5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

We are more likely to follow through on our plans when we are held accountable by others. To increase your chances for success, establish a trusted confidant, with whom you can share your weekly action plan. Knowing that you've shared your action plan intentions with a friend, loved one, or caregiver will help keep you on track and give you someone to celebrate milestones with.

***EXAMPLE: Julie, my sister***

# MY CHOICES Action Plan©



1) Start date:

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

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# MY CHOICES Action Plan©

1) Start date:

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2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

---



3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

---

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

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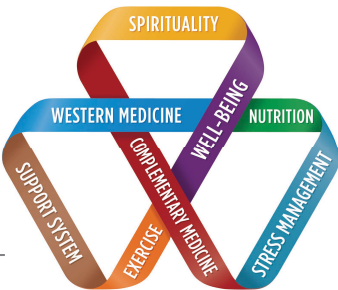
# MY CHOICES Action Plan©

1) Start date:

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_



3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

\_\_\_\_\_

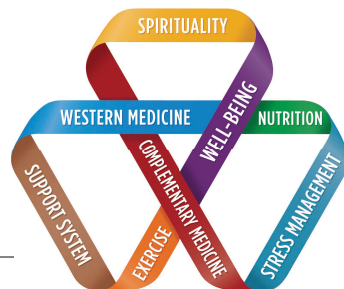
# MY CHOICES Action Plan©

1) Start date:

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2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

---



3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

---

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

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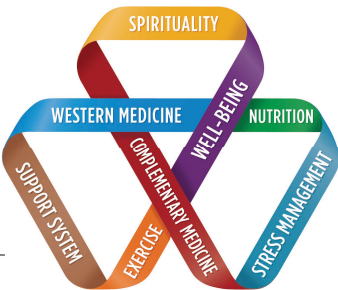
# MY CHOICES Action Plan©

1) Start date:

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_



3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

\_\_\_\_\_

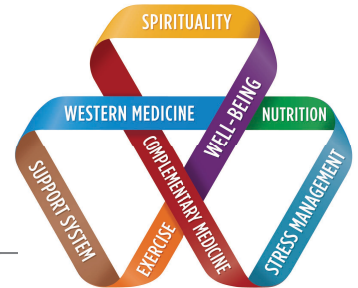
# MY CHOICES Action Plan©

1) Start date:

---

2) Which health care area does your action plan address?

---



3) Which health care goal does your action plan address?

---

4) What is your **SMART** action plan?

***Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Relevant / Timebound***

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5) Who will you share this action plan with and turn to for support?

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# ACT

## Assess Outcomes

At the end of the week (or action plan end date) revisit your action plan. Did you achieve your goal? If you did, what were the outcomes of that achievement? If you didn't, what might be the reason(s) why? Here are some questions to ask yourself when assessing your action plans:

### **If you achieve your action plan:**

- ◆ What made your action plan achievable?
- ◆ What effect has completing your action plan had on your mood and emotions?
- ◆ What effect has completing your action plan had on your physical health and/or symptoms?
- ◆ What lessons did you learn from your successful action plan that you can apply to another action plan in the future?

### **If you do not achieve your action plan:**

- ◆ Why do you think you weren't able to achieve the action plan? Were the elements that prevented you from completing your plan within or beyond your control?
- ◆ How might you have modified your action plan to have made it more likely to achieve?
- ◆ Did you communicate your action plan to a trusted support person?  
If no, why not?
- ◆ What lessons did you learn from an uncompleted action plan that you can use to help you develop a successful action plan in the future?



# ACT



## Track Your Journey

**You can track your health care journey in several areas:**

- ◆ Throughout your journey, track your physical health status by using the best of Western medicine diagnostics. This may include recurring bloodwork, screenings, imaging, and physical exams. Be proactive about scheduling these diagnostics and labs and following up with your doctor to get the results. There are several websites that will help you interpret lab results as well. Keep records of all results. Over time, these reports and findings may provide you with crucial clues as to what is working (and what isn't) with regard to your health care plan.
- ◆ Many people find it helpful to keep a symptom diary. Symptom diaries can help you determine patterns and trends in symptoms and may help you identify triggers. One is included in the 'Tools and Resources' section.
- ◆ Track your action planning outcomes. Keep a record of the results of your action plans – completed and uncompleted. You will be able to watch small accomplishments multiply, building confidence in your ability to make healthy changes. A record of uncompleted plans will help you identify health care goals that may not be realistic, or external factors that make action plans harder to complete. An action plan tracking and assessment sheet is included in the 'Tools and Resources' section.



---

Track and assess your action plans using the **MY CHOICES 6 Week Action Plan Tracking and Self-Assessment Sheet**© on pg. 101

# ACT

## MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©

Maintaining a health care calendar can be helpful in so many ways:

- ◆ Keeping health care provider appointments
- ◆ Scheduling self-care and wellness activities
- ◆ Sharing your health care appointments with loved ones
- ◆ Goal and action planning for the weeks and months ahead
- ◆ Tracking symptoms or health-related updates

Health care calendars can help you stay organized and motivated on your healing journey, while action plans are useful tools to help you to achieve larger health care goals. The 'MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©' has been created to provide you with both these tools in an easy-to-use, integrated format.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Refer to your 'MY CHOICES Integrative Health Care Plan©' and 'MY CHOICES Action Plan©' worksheets to complete 'MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©'.

Record your action plan for the week in the space provided on the left-hand side of the calendar:

Box 1, **My Weekly (Blank) Action Plan:** In the blank, write the health care area (from the Health care Options section) that your plan addresses.

Box 2, **Goal:** Which goal from your My Plan worksheet does your Action Plan address?

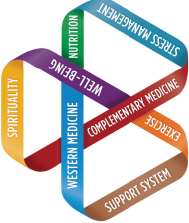
Box 3, **SMART Action Plan:** What is your weekly action plan (from your 'MY CHOICES Action Plan©')?

Box 4, **Support Person:** Who did you designate to support you in this action plan?

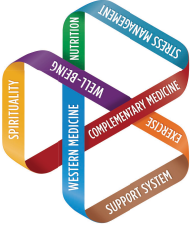
**Motivating Message of the Week:** Record an inspiring quote or encouraging words that will motivate you throughout the week.

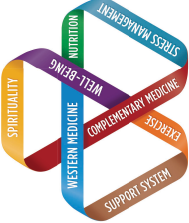
Use the **weekly calendar** to keep track of health care appointments and self-care commitments for the week, and include components of your action plan in your week's schedule (for example, carve out time in your weekly calendar for exercise, meditation, or socializing with friends).

The **question boxes** located along the bottom of the weekly calendar are meant to encourage reflection, motivation, and planning. Use them to keep a written record of your thoughts or simply as private reflection exercises.

<div> <div>MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©</div>  </div>							
Week of:		Motivating message of the week:					
SUNDAY		MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<div>My Weekly _____</div> <div>Action Plan</div> <div>2. Goal:</div> <div>3. S.M.A.R.T. Action Plan:</div> <div>4. Support Person:</div>		What are my health care needs this week?		What am I looking forward to this week?		What am I grateful for this week?	
						Did I achieve my weekly plan? If yes, what is the outcome? If no, what got in the way?	

My Weekly _____	MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©						
	Week of:	Motivating message of the week:					
	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Action Plan							
2. Goal:							
3. S.M.A.R.T. Action Plan:							
4. Support Person:							



<div> <div>MY CHOICES Weekly Action Planning Calendar©</div>  </div>													
My Weekly _____ Action Plan		Motivating message of the week:											
Week of:		SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY					
2. Goal:  3. S.M.A.R.T. Action Plan:													
									What are my health care needs this week?		What am I looking forward to this week?		What am I grateful for this week?
									Did I achieve my weekly plan? If yes, what is the outcome? If no, what got in the way?				
4. Support Person:													

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# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## Tips for a Productive Health Care Provider Visit

You can maximize the value and benefit you get out of one-on-one time with any health care provider by taking a proactive and engaged approach to your appointments. Here are a few tips to help you make efficient use of office visits and prepare for them ahead of time.

- ✓ Get your records together.

Provide the following to all your care providers:

- 1) A full medical history, including a family medical history
- 2) Health records: Hospital records, lab results, diagnostic reports, health screening reports, etc...
- 3) A list of all prescriptions, over the counter medicines, vitamins, and supplements you take (see pg. 99)

- ✓ Take the intake questionnaire seriously.

If this is your first visit with a provider, thoughtfully and thoroughly complete the provider's intake questionnaire. Fill out the questionnaire ahead of time, so that you aren't rushed and at risk of omitting important information. *We don't recommend recording private, identifying health information in this planner, but you can download a generic intake questionnaire directly from our website: <https://caringambassadors.org/healthcare-tools/>*

- ✓ Keep a symptom diary.

Keep a short diary of symptoms and physical problems – even those that may not seem to be related to the condition for which you are seeing your provider. A symptom tracker can help you and your providers establish the effectiveness of medications and therapies, potential triggers, and overall health trends.

- ✓ Bring a health ally to your appointments.

A trusted friend or loved one can keep notes throughout the appointment, ensuring that you are able to engage in a productive discussion with your provider without distraction. Tell your ally what you want to get out of the appointment ahead of time, and instruct them to jump in if you've forgotten to address any of your concerns or questions.

- ✓ Make the most of the opening discussion.

“What brings you in today?” The comments and concerns laid out by a patient as a response to this question shape the overall tone of an office visit and have implications for diagnostics, referrals, and treatment plans. Take advantage of this opportunity to address your immediate health concerns, as well as bigger picture items like your overall health goals or some of the external factors in life that may be contributing to health problems or flare-ups.

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

- ✓ Go in with information and questions; come out with next steps and answers.

Information empowers you and all members of your health care team; arm yourself with information both before and after an office visit. The information that you bring to the appointment will help keep you on track and ensure that your provider has the information they need to treat you effectively and plan for next steps. The information you leave with should address all questions and concerns you had prior to your appointment, provide you with clear next steps for treatment and management of your chronic health condition, and enable you to confidently make knowledgeable decisions about your medical condition and overall health and well-being.

- ✓ Request an office summary.

Prevent errors, misunderstandings, or confusion (for both you and your provider). Review your clinical summary as a team prior to leaving your appointment. If you or your health ally were taking notes, review these with your provider at the end of the appointment as well.



# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## Medical Portfolio Checklist

A ‘medical portfolio’ is a comprehensive story of your medical history and health. It will help you keep organized, track changes to your health status and symptoms, identify triggers and helpful treatments, and prove an invaluable tool for preparing for and making the most of provider visits.

You can keep your medical portfolio in hard copy using a three-ring binder or accordion folder. Alternatively, you can keep an electronic copy as an encrypted file on your personal computer or external hard drive. Stick with a system that works for you!

What should you include in your medical portfolio? Here is a list of the basics (you’ll find some of these tools included later in this section):

- ❑ Research: Scientific articles, reports, and current news about your medical condition(s) that interest you and may be appropriate to discuss with your medical provider(s)
- ❑ Lab and diagnostic results: Including blood work, imaging, biopsy results, and other diagnostics
- ❑ Treatment History: A summary and timeline of treatments for your medical condition(s), including Western medicine treatments, complementary treatments and therapies, and lifestyle changes such as special diets or exercise regimens
- ❑ Clinical summaries: Written summaries of all health care provider appointments
- ❑ Symptom Diaries: Records of any symptoms related to your physical, mental, or emotional health, as well as possible side-effects of any medications or other therapies
- ❑ Medications sheet: A detailed list of all current prescriptions, vitamins, and supplements, including dosage and intended usage information
- ❑ Health care team information: A list of all your medical providers and other health care practitioners
- ❑ Health history: A complete history of your health and medical conditions
- ❑ Family medical history: You may have to do some detective work to complete a thorough and accurate family medical history, but the “clues” it can provide your doctor will be worth it
- ❑ Information provided by your doctor or health care practitioner: Any disease or treatment specific information provided to you by any of your health care practitioners

***The patient has a wealth of information that the physician’s not going to be aware of if they don’t bring it up.***

— Dr. Ramona Seidel, MD

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## My Integrative Health Care Team: Provider & Practitioner Reference Sheet

### Western Medicine

Primary Care Provider	Specialist
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:
Pharmacist	Dentist
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:
Provider (Other)	Provider (Other)
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Complementary Medicine Systems and Therapies

Provider/Practitioner	Provider/Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Nutrition

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## My Integrative Health Care Team: Provider & Practitioner Reference Sheet

### Exercise

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Stress Management

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Well-being

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Support System

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

### Spirituality

Practitioner	Practitioner
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Website:	Website:
Notes:	Notes:

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## My Medications and Supplements

Tell all members of your health care team (doctors, complementary medicine practitioners, and others) about all the medications you are taking, including prescription medications, over the counter medications, herbs, supplements, and vitamins.

### Prescription Medicines

Name of Medicine:	Dose & time(s) taken (ex. 400mg daily at 2PM):	Prescribed by:	Reason for medicine:	Side effects and notes:

### Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicines

Name of OTC Medicine:	Dose & time(s) taken (ex. 200mg daily at 2PM):	Recommended by:	Reason for OTC medicine:	Side effects and notes:

### Herbs, Vitamins, and Dietary Supplements

Name of herb, vitamin or supplement:	Dose & time(s) taken (ex. 500 IU in the morning):	Recommended by:	Reason for supplement:	Side effects and notes:

## TOOLS & RESOURCES

## GENERAL SYMPTOM DIARY

[illegible]

*Credit: Adapted from Bryan Hodge, DO, Pardee Hendersonville Family Health Center, Hendersonville, N.C.  
Copyright ©2013 AAFP. [www.aafp.org/fpm/2013/0500/p24.html](http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2013/0500/p24.html)*

# MY CHOICES 6 Week Action Plan Tracking and Self-Assessment Sheet©

(To be used with the *MY CHOICES Action Plan*©, p. 82)

Plan#	Dates: from-to	Action Plan Completed?	Self-Assessment	Lesson: questions for consideration
Ex. 1	1/7/19- 1/13/19	Yes	<div>E/M: How you feel emotionally and/or mentally at the end of the action plan week</div> <div>P: How you feel physically at the end of the action plan week AND/OR Your physical health this week as measured by a doctor's exam, diagnostics, or testing</div> <div>E/M: Hopeful, grateful for support team</div> <div>P: Status quo, back pain and fatigued</div>	<div>What made your action plan achievable OR What factors contributed to being unable to complete your action plan?</div> <div>What lesson did you learn from this plan that you can use to develop a successful action plan in the future?</div> <div>My plan became easier to stick to as the week progressed - hang in there!</div>
1			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	
2			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	
3			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	
4			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	
5			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	
6			<div>E/M:</div> <div>P:</div>	

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

**Resources:** Helpful websites for your health care journey.

For additional resources, visit [www.caringambassadors.org/healthcare-resources/](http://www.caringambassadors.org/healthcare-resources/)

## Locating Health Care Providers and Practitioners:

Find a doctor, American Medical Association: [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

Find a dentist, American Dental Association: [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

Find an integrative medicine center, Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health:  
[www.imconsortium.org](http://www.imconsortium.org)

Find a naturopathic doctor, The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians:  
[www.naturopathic.org](http://www.naturopathic.org)

Find an acupuncturist, National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine: [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org)

Find a chiropractor, American Chiropractic Association: [www.acatoday.org](http://www.acatoday.org)

Find a massage therapist, American Massage Therapy Association: [www.amtamassage.org](http://www.amtamassage.org)

Find a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Find a therapist, counselor, or social worker, GoodTherapy: [www.goodtherapy.org](http://www.goodtherapy.org)

Find a psychologist, American Psychological Association: [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

Find a psychiatrist, American Psychiatric Association: [www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)

## Western Medicine:

Diseases and Conditions, Mayo Clinic: [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions)

MedlinePlus, National Institutes of Health: [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

Clinical Trials, National Institutes of Health: [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)

PubMed scientific literature database, National Institutes of Health:  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Lab Tests Online, American Association for Clinical Chemistry: [www.labtestsonline.org](http://www.labtestsonline.org)

## Complementary Medicine:

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health: [www.nccih.nih.gov](http://www.nccih.nih.gov)

CAM on PubMed, NCCIH and the National Library of Medicine:  
[www.nccih.nih.gov/research/camonpubmed](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/camonpubmed)

Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing, University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing: [www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu)

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database: [www.naturalmedicines.com](http://www.naturalmedicines.com)

## Nutrition:

Eating Healthy, Center for Science in the Public Interest: [www.cspinet.org/eating-healthy](http://www.cspinet.org/eating-healthy)

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Healthy Weight, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/healthyweight](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight)

Dietary Supplements, US Food and Drug Administration: [www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements](http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements)

Anti-inflammatory Foods, Harvard University:  
[www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/foods-that-fight-inflammation](http://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/foods-that-fight-inflammation)

# TOOLS & RESOURCES

## Exercise:

Physical Activity, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

[www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/index.html)

The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability: [www.nchpad.org](http://www.nchpad.org)

Exercise videos: [www.fitnessblender.com](http://www.fitnessblender.com) and [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Exercise and calorie tracker: [www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com)

Find your local YMCA: [www.ymca.net/find-your-y](http://www.ymca.net/find-your-y)

## Stress Management:

Center for Mindfulness, University of Massachusetts: [www.umassmed.edu/cfm](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm)

Relaxation Techniques for Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health:

[www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm)

Meditation and Mindfulness Practice, Headspace: [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

## Well-being:

National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml)

Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison:

[www.centerhealthyminds.org](http://www.centerhealthyminds.org)

Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing, University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing: [www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu)

Project Happiness: [www.projecthappiness.org](http://www.projecthappiness.org)

## Support System:

Patient advocacy and navigation, Patient Advocate Foundation:

[www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

Patients Like Me: [www.patientslikeme.com](http://www.patientslikeme.com)

My Health Teams: [www.myhealthteams.com](http://www.myhealthteams.com)

CaringBridge: [www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)

Meal Train: [www.mealtrain.com](http://www.mealtrain.com)

## Spirituality:

Spirituality, Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing:

[www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/spirituality](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/spirituality)

Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health, Duke University:

[www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu](http://www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu)

Spirituality & Practice: [www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com)





*We know what we are, but know not what we may be.*

— William Shakespeare



*If there's life, there is hope.*

— Stephen Hawking



*It is reasonable to expect the doctor to recognize that science may not have all the answers to problems of health and healing."*

— Norman Cousins



*What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.*

— Unknown

# What You Do Matters

## Help us help others by donating today.

Please consider making a donation of any amount to support Caring Ambassadors in:

- EMPOWERING people to be advocates for their health
- EDUCATING on health care and wellness options
- ADVOCATING for equitable health policies

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*As a patient who has experienced having a chronic disease and who works with patients, I highly recommend this comfortably written book. There is no one size fits all and it covers something for everyone! A Must Read for anyone embarking on this daunting journey.*

— Ronni Marks, The Hepatitis C Mentor & Support Group, Inc.

*My Choices, A Planner for Healing is a compressive guide for healing. My Choices<sup>©</sup> is versatile and can be used with any health, emotional or life changing event. I have seen many health planners, but never one as multifunctional as My Choices<sup>©</sup>. This will be beneficial to all needing healing.*

— Deb Violette, President, Free ME from Lung Cancer

*It (My Choices<sup>©</sup>) made you think. Before I got the book, I was just doing the same things that I do. After going through the book...it gave you alternatives. It gave you suggestions you never would have thought of.*

— Focus group participant

*I wish I got it the day I was diagnosed.*

— Naeem Callaway



## Caring Ambassadors Program

*Empowering people to be ambassadors for their own health since 1997*

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