

Living with a Chronic Condition

In Newfoundland and Labrador, 59% of people over the age of 12 have at least one chronic health condition. These are health conditions that may last over a long period of time or may never go away. There are many types of these conditions; some of the more common ones are arthritis, diabetes, heart diseases, cancer, lung diseases such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and obesity. Even though there are many types of chronic conditions, people with different diagnosis often experience some of the same symptoms, such as pain, fatigue, stress, and difficulty sleeping. Many individuals with chronic health problems have difficulty completing some daily activities, and may feel sad, angry or depressed. Unlike acute conditions, chronic conditions do not usually have a cure; rather individuals have to learn to manage their symptoms so that they do not interfere with their quality of life.

Self management refers to a person's ability to manage their own symptoms. Good self-management often slows the progression of chronic conditions, prevents complications, and may also reduce the number of times a person has to visit a physician or a hospital or health centre. Research has shown that people who are good self managers experience better health and have a better quality of life.

In 2009, the Canadian Community Health Survey revealed that only 31% of the Newfoundland and Labrador population, age 12 and over consumed adequate amounts of vegetables and fruit. Vegetables and fruit are examples of healthy food choices recommended by Canada's Food Guide for better overall health and lower risk of disease. What you eat has a major impact on how your body functions. Choose healthy options like fruits and vegetables more often. Adults should eat 7-10 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Prepare your food with little or no added fat, sugar, or salt.

If you have a chronic condition, there are plenty ways you can live a happier and healthier life such as:

- Track and understand your symptoms. Contact your health care team early if your symptoms change or are worsening.
- Exercise! This doesn't mean you have to run a marathon, but doing some physical activity each day has proven benefits. Even a short walk or taking the stairs instead of the elevator can make a big difference. If you are inactive, start with a short walk and build up to longer periods. Think about exercising with a friend or a group, the time will go by quicker.
- Stay active with friends, family and your job or hobbies. This may mean changing how you normally do things and letting people know if you need help.
- Manage emotions such as depression and anger that may arise as a result of your situation. Talk to a close friend or family member about your emotions.
- Change your relationship with your health care providers so that they are more like your partners and advisors. You manage the condition on a daily basis, so you need to talk honestly with your health care team about how you are feeling and what you need.
- Spend time with people who successfully manage their own conditions and learn from them.

- Join a support group for your condition that will give you the ability to talk about the things you are experiencing with those who are going through similar issues.
- Set clear, achievable goals on how to manage your health on a daily and weekly basis and follow through with them!

There are many ways to become a good self-manager. Reading about your condition, looking for online resources and taking classes are all ways you can start on the path to better health. Your health care provider may have ideas or hints to help you get started. Western Health also offers a program called "Improving Health: My Way," a series of sessions to help you become a better self-manager. To sign up for the workshop, volunteer as a workshop leader or for more information call Priscilla at 637-5000 ext 6689, or look online at www.westernhealth.nl.ca.

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