

PREFACE

Many people are able to take good health for granted for much of their lives. When they occasionally become ill, the health care system seems well suited to meet their needs. But as people age, everything changes. The need to prevent illness becomes more pressing, illnesses become more common, and the need for health care seems to be a routine part of life. The health care system may seem complex, impersonal, and difficult to manage, as though it were created for someone else. Explanations and useful information are often difficult to find.

The Merck Manual of Health & Aging was written to help people navigate the health care system and find useful information on health and disease. Whether you are in the best of health and hope to stay that way, are ill and hope to get better, or are in persistently poor health and facing the reality of living with disease, *The Merck Manual of Health & Aging* gives you and those who care about you the information needed. Its goal is to explain when others will not or cannot. The vast experience of The Merck Manuals, which are relied upon worldwide by millions of health care practitioners and members of the general public, has gone into creating this new book. The contributors, consultants, and editorial board members—recognized experts in the field of caring for older people—bring their knowledge, experience, and good judgment to this book. You can rely on the accuracy and honesty of this book.

Because care of older people is complex and involves the expertise of many different health care practitioners, this book covers a wide variety of information. Included is how the body ages, how the health care system does and should care for older people, how to strengthen and improve relationships with health care practitioners, and how to cope with disease. The book provides in-depth information about most of the disorders that affect older people and about differences in how disorders may affect older people.

Knowledge is power, and today knowledge is essential. The more information you have, the better you are able to work with

your doctors, nurses, social workers, and other health care practitioners. *The Merck Manual of Health & Aging* is a supplement to, not a substitute for, professional health care. It provides you with what you need and want to know in a way that other books cannot. Use the information to better understand what is happening to your body, to ensure that you are getting the best care, and to make the best decisions about health care. If you are fortunate enough to never need this information, we hope that it will still fascinate you with the wonder of the human body.

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Special Note

The authors, reviewers, editors, and publisher have made extensive efforts to ensure that the information is accurate and conforms to the standards accepted at the time of publication. However, you are advised to discuss information obtained in this book with a doctor, pharmacist, nurse, or other health care practitioner.

COMMITTED TO PROVIDING MEDICAL INFORMATION: MERCK AND THE MERCK MANUALS

In 1899, the American drug manufacturer Merck & Co. first published a small 192-page book titled *Merck's Manual of the Materia Medica*. It was meant as an aid to physicians and pharmacists, reminding doctors that “Memory is treacherous.” Compact in size, easy to use, comprehensive, and inexpensive, *The Merck Manual* (as it was later known) became a favorite of those involved in medical care and others in need of a medical reference. Even Albert Schweitzer carried a copy to Africa in 1913, and Admiral Byrd carried a copy to the South Pole in 1929.

By the 1980s, the book had become the world's largest selling medical text and was translated into more than a dozen languages. While the name of the parent company has changed somewhat over the years, the book's name has remained constant, known officially as *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy* but usually referred to as *The Merck Manual* and sometimes “The Merck.” Throughout the book's modern history, Merck and Co., Inc. has published it on a not-for-profit basis, keeping its price low so that as many people as possible can own and use a copy.

In 1990, the editors of *The Merck Manual* introduced *The Merck Manual of Geriatrics*. This new book quickly became the best-selling textbook of geriatric care, providing specific and comprehensive information on the care of older people. Now in its 3rd edition, *The Merck Manual of Geriatrics* is published in five languages. The creation and continued publication of this book reflect Merck's commitment to the world's aging population and the company's desire to improve geriatric care globally.

In 1997, *The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* was published. In this revolutionary book, the editors translated the complex medical information in *The Merck Manual* into plain language, producing a book meant for all those people interested in medical care who did not have a medical degree. The book received critical acclaim and sold over 2 million

copies. The *Second Home Edition* was released in 2003 and continues Merck's commitment to providing comprehensive, understandable medical information to all people at low cost.

The Merck Manual of Health & Aging continues Merck's commitment to education and geriatric care, providing information on aging and the care of older people in words understandable by the lay public.

Merck also supports the community of chemists and others with the need to know about chemical compounds with *The Merck Index*. First published in 1889, this publication actually predates *The Merck Manual* and is the most widely used text of its kind. *The Merck Veterinary Manual* was first published in 1955. It provides information on the health care of animals and is the preeminent text in its field.

Merck and Co., Inc. is one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies. Merck is committed to bringing out the best in medicine and, as part of that effort, continues to proudly provide all of The Merck Manuals on a not-for-profit basis as a service to the community. Additionally, *The Merck Manual*, *The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Second Home Edition*, *The Merck Manual of Geriatrics*, *The Merck Manual of Health & Aging*, and *The Merck Veterinary Manual* are available free on Merck's internet site at www.merck.com.