

SECTION 2

CARING FOR SELF AND OTHERS

The need for good, unbiased health care information runs deep, whether people are seeking to become more active in caring for themselves or others. Prevention, healthy nutrition, appropriate use of drugs, and the wide array of diagnostic tests and complementary and alternative therapies are topics at the forefront of caring for self.

Communicating effectively with health care practitioners goes hand-in-hand with caring for self or others. The variety of practitioners to communicate with is vast: doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, pharmacists. And communications take place in

many sites: doctor's office, hospital, rehabilitation facility, nursing home. Navigating a complex health system that has so many types of practitioners and sites of care can be exceedingly difficult and is often frustrating. Interacting with health care practitioners and ensuring continuity of care can be improved by effective communication, which begins with being well informed.

Critically important for most people, also, are strategies for caregiving. Knowing what kind of care loved ones need and how to provide it is never easy. Finally, palliative and end-of-life care is a delicate issue that nearly everyone faces.

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Preventive Medical Care

Traditional medical care focuses on improving health by identifying and treating health problems that have already produced symptoms or complications. In contrast, preventive medical care focuses on preventing health problems from occurring. Preventive care also focuses on diagnosing problems before symptoms or complications arise, when the chances of recovery are greatest.

Pessimists might see an effort to prevent health problems in older people as an attempt to “close the barn door after the horse is already out.” These pessimists think preventive measures are pointless once a person has reached old age. Although beginning at an early age is best, it is probably never too late to start on the road to prevention.