



## ElderCare Q&A

### Managing Your Own Illness

#### **Q: What is disease self-management?**

**A:** There is a growing movement in America to help seniors take more responsibility for their own health through techniques called "self-management."

Arthritis, diabetes, heart disease - these are illnesses and chronic conditions that affect seniors at a much higher rate than younger people. More than one in three people over the age of 65 have a fall each year. Two out of ten people over the age of 60 have diabetes. 70% of Americans who die each year, die of a chronic disease.

These self-management programs empower elders to take control of their health, and to maintain a healthier lifestyle. Classes are held in self-management techniques, usually in "peer learning" groups, where members support each other.

One of the best known of these programs is The Stanford University Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, which stresses the consumer's role in managing their illnesses and building their self-confidence so they can be successful in adopting healthier behaviors. The Stanford program consists of workshops conducted once a week for two and a half hours over six weeks in community-based settings like a senior center, or a meals program.

People with different chronic conditions meet together, and the workshops are run by trained and certified leaders, at least one of whom has a chronic illness.

Workshops help train seniors to deal with issues like frustration, pain, isolation, and fatigue; exercise to improve strength and endurance; eating healthier; how to use medications properly; how to talk effectively with a doctor or other health care professional.

These basic self-management programs have been proven to help people with chronic conditions to improve their health status by reducing unhealthy behaviors, which in turn leads to less need of health care services, like hospital visits.

Massachusetts is one of the states that is offering The Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. Our state also has programs for:

- fitness and physical activity, and strength training
- preventing falls
- nutrition workshops that teach the value of choosing healthy foods, and maintaining an active lifestyle.
- managing mild to moderate depression and/or substance abuse.

These self-management programs began about seven years ago. Since that time, more than 44,000 seniors have received help through disease and disability prevention programs nationally. These programs lead to positive outcome for seniors. People who took the "Matter of Balance" program on falls, for example, report that they are more confident in taking a walk, climbing stairs, carrying bundles without falling, and more confident that they can increase their strength, find ways to reduce falls, and protect themselves if they do fall. They also report fewer falls after taking the course.

To learn more about these self management courses, or to become a Group Leader yourself, call 1-888-222-6171 and ask about the chronic disease self-management programs in your area.