

# 20 Tips to Improve Your Health Care

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First Edition

Mini-Medical School  
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20 Tips to Improve Your Health Care  
By Raymond Lengel

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1. Health Care – Popular works
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## **About the Author**

Raymond Lengel, a certified family nurse practitioner, has worked in multiple fields of nursing. For the last seven years he has worked in primary care. In addition to being a certified family nurse practitioner he is a registered nurse with the state of Ohio.

Initially, Raymond received a Bachelor of Science degree in exercise science from the Ohio State University. Then he attained a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing from the Allen College of Nursing in Waterloo, Iowa. After working for a number of years as an exercise physiologist/registered nurse he enrolled at Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio and got a Master of Science degree in nursing.

His writing career includes over 80 on-line continuing educational courses developed for nurses. Two articles in the magazine *Long-Term Care Interface* and one in *Clinical Reviews* have been published.

He is also the author of two books, *Health Care Responsibility: The Older Adult's Guide to Surviving the Health Care System* and *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

Raymond has also presented a number of lectures on a multitude of health care topics including influenza, cardiac risk reduction, stress management, exercise and nutrition.

## **Disclaimer**

This book is designed to provide basic information about the health care system and the patient's role in helping to manage his or her own health. It is sold with the understanding that each individual is unique and the book cannot provide individual advice to any one person.

This book is meant to compliment and enhance your interaction with the health care system not to serve as an alternative to medical advice or care. Utilize the system presented in this book, but be sure to work with your doctor. Your doctor is the best source of health care information for you and the unique set of conditions that are present in your body. The goal of this book is to help you with the interaction between you and your doctor, not replace it.

The author has extended every effort to make sure this book is complete and as accurate as possible. Medicine is an evolving field and ongoing research may raise some questions about some of the data in the book. There may be mistakes, both in content and typographical. The book should be used as a general guide and not as the final source for your health care information. Information is current only up to the printing date.

The goal of this book is to educate and entertain. The author and publisher will not have liability or responsibility to any person or entity to any loss or damage to have been caused by information in this book.

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## **Introduction – The Many Problems of the Health Care System**

The World Health Organization reports that the United States has the 37<sup>th</sup> best health care system in the world. America's health care system is fraught with problems and its patient satisfaction is rated among the worst in the world. Even though the America's health care system is envied by the world, it ranks at the bottom of many health care indicators. In the developed world, the United States is at the bottom of the list for infant mortality and life expectancy.

Health care is not the same as it was fifty years ago. Many things have improved over the last fifty years, but the personal touch of medicine has been lost in the process. Medical science has made tremendous advances in the treatment of heart disease, cancer, infectious disease and diabetes just to name a few – but these advances have come at a cost.

Health care is expensive. Not only in dollars and cents, but also in time. A patient can call for an appointment, be told they can be squeezed into the doctor's busy schedule tomorrow at 3 PM, and then not be seen until 5 PM the next day.

This problem is likely to get worse as time passes as fewer and fewer doctors are choosing to go into primary care medicine specialties such as pediatrics, family practice, geriatrics and internal medicine. Instead doctors are opting for more lucrative specialties – and why not when many specialties pay over twice the annual salary of a primary care provider.

The use of mid-level providers, such as the nurse practitioner or the physician assistant, will help ease the shortage. None-the-less it is critical that patients learn to take care of themselves and know when they should go to the doctor and when a trial over the counter medications or other measures can be helpful.

Health care in America is the most expensive in the world. In 2006, the United States spent \$7,421 in per capita health expenditures, which is over 50 percent more than any other country. Contributing to high health care cost in the United States are cost of medications, top rate medical technologies, the extensive use of diagnostic tests, salaries of doctors and hospital administrators.

The use of the emergency room as a primary care service not only results in

poor health care but it is a costly form of care. Emergency room physicians do not know the patients and are more prone to ordering expensive tests and treatments.

The health care system is overburdened, fragmented and as a whole not concerned about your health as much as you are. Each patient must assume responsibility for his or her own health.

Running to the doctor, urgent clinic or emergency room is not necessarily the best option for every situation. Health care providers often do things to appease the patient instead of doing the right thing.

Doctor appointments, in the eyes of many patients, are sub-par. Health care visits are typically about 15 minutes. The health care provider has a lot of work to do in that short visit. The health care provider needs to review the chart, talk to the patient, examine the patient, write in the chart, answer questions, fill out forms and dispense prescriptions. Time limits placed on office visits do not allow the health care provider to spend adequate time with the patient.

Health care consumers need to maximize this short time with the doctor. This includes being knowledgeable, organized and knowing how to communicate with the health care system. Some doctor's practice under the assumption that doctor knows best and do not feel it is necessary to share all information with their patients.

Health care consumers are ultimately responsible for their health and need to act accordingly. The health care system is in need of many changes and people need to realize that they need to take responsibility for their health. If you do not take an active role in your health care you will waste a lot of time, money and quality of life.

Get educated about how to improve the quality of your care. This book will do just that. It will help improve your knowledge of the health care system. With improved knowledge you will be better able to care for yourself.

This book will look to help you improve your health care. It will help you:

- Understand the health care system
- Understand doctor visits
- Improve the quality of your health care visit

- Improve the quality of your health

## **Tip 1: Be Prepared for your Doctor's Visit**

Each doctor visit has limited time and a lot needs to be accomplished during that time. Be organized for this visit.

Patients see the doctor under three broad circumstances: an acute illness, follow-up and a routine maintenance exam. Learning how to organize health care information for each of these appointments improves your health care.

Doctors have limited time set aside for each appointment and that time needs to be maximized. Many individuals ramble on about multiple insignificant points, putting them at significant risk for receiving poor health care. The time in the doctor's appointment needs to be maximized to its full potential. Being organized prior to the appointment helps assure you take advantage of all of your doctor's skills.

Making a diagnosis is difficult. Contrary to what most people think, medicine is not an exact science. There are multiple ways of handling one medical problem - it is possible for one patient to present to five different doctors with the same complaint and get five different answers. The physician needs detailed, well thought out and accurate information to properly diagnose and treat each individual.

Many patients present with one or two symptoms and it is up to the doctor to determine what the diagnosis is and how to treat the condition. Doctors need accurate descriptions of these symptoms because diagnosis and treatment is based on the history.

It is therefore essential that each patient provide as much information as possible to make the diagnosis as easy as possible for the physician. It is the responsibility of each individual to provide this information. Being prepared and organized for a doctor's appointment is one of the most important things that you can do to assure you get this information to your doctor.

When talking about symptoms, be clear, objective, truthful and persistent. Many health concerns are sensitive and embarrassing, but without all the details, the doctor will not be able to care for you properly. The only way to get proper health care is to share all of your health care concerns. Do not let

embarrassment be a barrier to communication with your doctor.

Be prepared to get all the necessary answers during your appointment. Forms for preparing for your appointment are available for download at [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) in the book *Improve Your Communication: How Talking Can Improve Health Care and Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

## Tip 2: Maintain your Health Record

Medical records are complex and contain multiple pieces of personal and medical information. It is a vital that every health care provider has full knowledge of your medical history. Being able to transmit this information to the health care system bestows a distinct advantage in getting the best health care.

The personal health record, which is similar to a medical chart that a physician or health care system would keep on you, guarantees you are receiving the best health care possible. With the fragmentation of the health care system it is important to have all health care information in one spot. Maintaining your health record allows you stay organized and transmit accurate information to your health care providers.

All of your physicians and every health care setting, such as hospitals, nursing homes and surgical clinics, keep a copy of your medical record. Your medical record contains items that pertain to your health such as doctor's notes, lab work, surgical reports, and radiological exams.

Your personal health record contains all things contained in a medical record – but more. The personal health record assures that all of your health information is stored in one place. No more worrying about if your primary care doctor did not get a copy of a lab test or diagnostic procedure – you will have a copy that you can share.

Medical records are often incomplete. If you receive services from another health care provider or health care system, this information is likely not known to your doctor. Communication within the health care system is not optimal; each individual must take that responsibility upon him or herself.

The importance of maintaining a personal health care record
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provides a concise and complete way to organize complex medical histories</li><li>2. Improves communication of health information</li><li>3. Increases time with health care providers as less time is required for doctors to extract information</li><li>4. Secures more effective and efficient care</li></ol>

5. Allows patients to be partners in his or her health care
6. Cuts down on unnecessary testing because tests results will be available
7. Reduces medical errors

**Here is a list of what you should keep:**

- Demographic information including your name, address and emergency contacts
- Insurance information
- Social information including marital status, children, employment history, smoking, alcohol and drug history
- Immunization history
- Drug and food allergies and your reaction to those substances
- Medical diagnoses and the year you were diagnosed
- Surgeries and the year they were performed
- Family history
- Hospitalizations, including the dates, diagnosis and treatments
- Procedure notes. A copy of the report of all procedures that you have had including, but not limited to colonoscopies, stress tests and biopsies.
- Doctor lists. Record the name and number of all the doctors who are currently treating you. This includes your primary care doctor, any medical specialists, dentist, eye doctor, chiropractor and podiatrist.
- Medication lists. The medication list should include all prescription and over the counter drugs that you take routinely or on an as needed basis. In addition to the current medication list, it is helpful to have a list of all old medications that you have taken in the past. This list should include the name of the drug you have taken, when it was taken and why you are no longer taking it.
- Diagnostic procedures include x-rays, CAT scans, MRIs, echocardiograms, electrocardiograms and ultrasounds. Obtaining a copy of each of these tests help the physician know what previous tests you have had so there is no duplication of testing. It also assists the doctor in understanding what diseases have already been tested for.

- Lab work. Laboratory tests are very common in health care. Patients get laboratory evaluation for a variety of reasons including, assessing an acute illness, monitoring a chronic disease or screening for certain diseases. Tracking labs overtime assists the health care provider in monitoring disease.
- Advanced directives. This is a copy of your wishes at the end of life.
- Preventative health monitoring. Many preventative health tests are not preformed as recommended. Keeping a list of what and when testing is needed assures you are getting all recommended tests.
- Doctor visits. A section of your health record should include each or your physician visits.
- Chronic disease monitoring. Each individual has a unique combination of chronic diseases. Monitoring these diseases assures that they are cared for properly.

Ideally you would have this information all together in one convenient form.

For a copy of the personal health record visit <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com> and see *Improve Your Communication: How Talking Can Improve Health Care*.

### **Tip 3: Manage your Medications**

The current medical setting is set up around medicines. It is often a knee jerk reaction to prescribe a drug for a symptom but many questions should be considered when ever starting a new drug.

Preventing medicine errors is your responsibility, well, it is not completely your responsibility. With the changes in the health care system it is important that you take an active role in monitoring your medicines. You are at greatest risk when a new medicine is started or when you enter a new health care system. When you are admitted to the hospital or a nursing home caution must be used to assure you are receiving the proper medications.

The following are a list of tips to help make sure you use medications safely.

1. Keep a list of all your medicines. Keep a written list of all your medicines including the name, dose and why it was prescribed.
2. Keep a list of times when you take your medication and prepare your medications each week in a pill storage container that can be purchased at any drug store. Pill containers can be purchased with a compartment for each day or multiple compartments for each day. Fill up the drug container once a week and place the drug container in an easily accessible location.
3. Keep a medication list at your bedside when you are in hospital to assure you are receiving the proper medicines.
4. Record previous medicines. Keeping a list of medicines previously prescribed to you can be of tremendous help to the health care system. Patients are often tried on medicine that is ineffective or the side effects where too great to warrant its continued use. Doctors who are seeing the patient for the first time need to know what medicines the patient was on in the past and the reason a certain drug was discontinued. Many times doctors treat each patient as an individual chemistry experiment. Those with a long medical history behind them will benefit from knowing that history, which, will help cut down on much of the guesswork in prescribing medications.

5. Ask questions. Understand why you are on each medication and make sure your doctor gives you all the information.
6. Make sure all of your medicines have a reason for taking them. This may seem silly but many patients are on medications where the doctor and the patient are not sure why. If no one knows why you are on a medication, you should question if you need it.
7. Talk to your pharmacist. Whenever you are started on a new medicine ask your pharmacist if there is any drug interactions. Drug interactions are sometimes not considered by doctors when prescribing medicine – make sure both doctor and pharmacist address drug interactions.
8. Take notes during your office visit when being prescribed a new medication.
9. Take your medical record, including your medication list, when being admitted to the hospital.
10. Do not pay attention to direct to consumer advertising. It is set up to sway your thinking.
11. Get to know your pharmacist. Typically, pharmacists know more about medicine than your doctor does. Your pharmacist should know your medical history and allergies. The pharmacist can help guide you to taking proper OTC medications.
12. Take your personal health care record to the pharmacy.

For more information on safe usage of drugs and forms to improve the quality of your health care appointments visit [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) and check out the books *Improve Your Communication: How Talking Can Improve Health Care* and *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

## Tip 4: Talk to your Doctor

The effectiveness of any health care encounter is only as good as the interaction between the people involved. Each individual's health is a shared responsibility between the health care provider and the individual, but the only person in the health care interaction you can control is yourself.

Communicating your health care concerns is a challenging venture that needs to be mastered and is missing in the average health care encounter. Learning how to effectively communicate within the health care system can significantly enhance the quality of your health care.

Communicating with your doctor is an essential step in assuring good health. Good communication assists you in becoming an active member of your health care team and is one of the most important things you can do to prevent medical errors or oversights.

Doctors can make a diagnosis a majority of the time with a good description of the current problem without fancy medical tests. Because of this most doctors say that taking a medical history is one of the most important parts of their job.

Your ability to communicate with your doctor vastly improves your health care. Consumers and doctors often rely on fancy, expensive, and sometimes risky or painful medical tests in making diagnoses instead of going back to the basics of a good history and physical exam.

### **Talking to you doctor**

Doctors often speak over your head. Many are trained in science, as this helps them be better doctors because most of medicine is grounded in science. The art of communication is not focused on in medical school. Some doctors are excellent communicators, while others are not.

Have you ever known a doctor to interrupt you when you were telling him your story? Doctors have an agenda and if you don't get to their agenda, they will guide the conversation to their line of questioning.

Make sure your agenda gets covered. One step to help with this is to write things down. Write down a list of questions. Make two copies – one for you and one for your doctor. Place the most important questions at the top of the list.

At the end of the appointment make sure you understand the diagnosis and treatment. This is best accomplished when you take notes during a doctor's appointment.

You should walk out of each appointment with a diagnosis that is written down. In addition, you should walk out of any appointment with a copy of your lab results or tests. If you do not, you should have these documents mailed to you or be able to find them on your on-line medical record.

Understand your follow up. You should have an answer to all of these questions.

- How long should it be until I get better?
- When am I supposed to follow up?
- Who am I supposed to follow up with and how do I make that appointment?
- What should I watch out in regards to a complication?
- What would require me to make a more rapid follow up appointment?

For more information on how to communicate with your doctor and improve the quality of your health care visit [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) or check out the books *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems* or *Improve Your Communication: How Talking Can Improve Health Care*.

## **Tip 5: Track your Preventative Health**

Health care responsibility is a key element in the practice of preventative medicine. Many aspects of preventative medicine get missed within the American health care system.

In order to increase life expectancy, health care in the 21st century is going to need to improve prevention efforts. Preventative health care, when practiced properly, has the potential to save billions of dollars, increase quality of life, improve work productivity and extend life.

Do not assume that your doctor will remember to discuss, recommend or provide all the necessary measures to practice good preventive health care. While some doctors are better at this than others, most doctors simply have too many patients and not enough time to do a complete job at preventative medicine.

You need to take responsibility. Many aspects of preventative medicine are completely dependent upon the individual while others require collaboration between patient and the health care provider.

Preventative medicine involves a healthy lifestyle including exercise, nutrition and avoiding smoking. In addition to these practices there are many screenings and immunizations that make up good preventative health care.

There is no cookie cutter recipe for preventive screenings and immunizations. Many organizations have set up guidelines to help provide patients and doctors guidance as to which preventative health care measures are necessary. Discussion with your primary health care provider as to which tests/immunizations are needed assures testing is individualized.

Depending on your age and gender the type of preventative testing will vary. For example, children need multiple vaccinations when they are young. Fortunately, there is good compliance with these vaccinations, partly because schools require documentation of these vaccinations.

The quality of preventative health care is much worse as people age. There is no built in system to assure adults receive all necessary preventative testing or

immunizations. Therefore, adults have to assume personal responsibility for assuring that testing and immunizations get done.

The best way to do this is to review the guidelines and make sure each one is done. Common preventative activities that need to be considered for the healthy adult include:

- Blood pressure screening every 1-2 years
- Blood cholesterol screening starting at age 35 for men and 45 for women
- Blood sugar screening for diabetes or pre-diabetes every three years starting at age 45
- Colon cancer testing starting at age 50 for most and younger for select groups
- Annual flu shots
- Tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations every 10 years
- The shingles vaccine once at age 60.

For a complete listing of preventative testing and downloadable forms to help assure you are in compliance with guidelines check out Don't Get Sick: Seven Steps to Optimal Preventative Health Care at <http://mini-medicalschool.com>

## **Tip 6: Exercising and Eating Well Optimizes the Aging Process**

Not exercising can kill you. Poor diet and physical inactivity account for approximately 400,000 deaths per year. More importantly than reducing the risk of death, exercise maintains a high quality of life. The aging body goes through numerous changes that leads to disability with the rates of disability increased in individuals who are inactive.

Exercise protects against a number of the common chronic diseases. Diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels and heart disease are a few diseases positively affected by exercise.

Exercise is one of the most important activities to allow yourself to live long and healthy. Living an inactive lifestyle, not growing older, results in a decrease in strength and increases your risk for most chronic diseases. Exercise improves strength and your ability to function and live independently.

Good nutrition is an essential step in preserving good health. A healthy diet maintains a healthy body weight, prevents disease, and minimizes the effects of established disease. There is much confusion about what constitutes good nutrition. Whole books have been written about nutrition but four goals for eating to maintain health include:

- Maintain or attain an ideal body weight.
- Eat a healthy mix of food.
- Limit quantities of “bad” foods.
- Understand how disease affects your nutrition.

Nutritional status has an immense impact on not only maintaining health but on disease progression and patient healing. Good diets incorporate variety and are composed of lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean meats. Certain disease states affect the nutritional status of the older individual. A proper balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fats is a key factor to a healthy diet.

### **Key points**

- To lose weight – eat fewer calories than you expend.
- Know your body mass index and your weight goal.

- Utilizing the principals in the exercise section and engage in a safe and effective exercise program.

### **Tips to maintaining a healthy diet.**

- Eat nutrient-dense food and drink.
- Limit the amount of saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, added salt, sugar and alcohol.
- Unsaturated fats, such as vegetable oils are healthier than saturated fats, but should be used in moderation. Trans fats, which are fats found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils and many packaged baked goods, should be avoided.
- Eat lean cuts of meats with the fat trimmed.
- Fruits and vegetables are packed with substances that provide many health benefits. Eating at least five servings of fruits and/or vegetables may be the most important step to healthy eating.
- When eating dairy choose nonfat or 1% milk. Use cheeses that are nonfat, low fat or part skim.

For great products to help with exercise and nutrition visit:

Products to help with exercise and weight loss

[Turbulence Training](#) - Lose fat and gain muscle without cardio. Discover the cardio free fat loss workouts using weight training exercise and interval training to burn fat, get rid of stubborn belly fat, and build muscle.

[Top Secret Fat Loss](#) - The Reason You Can't Lose Weight has Nothing to Do With Your *Will-Power*, *Over-Eating* or the *Right Diet!* ... The Reason You are Fat and Unhealthy is Because You Have Disgusting *Plaque* and Horrible Little 'CRITTERS' Living in Your Guts!"

[Body Weight Exercise Revolution](#) is a bodyweight workout that delivers vitality, health & your best body ever In Just *28 days*. Bodyweight exercises only. No gym required. All NATURAL. No equipment required.

[Exercise Ebooks](#) are a series of ebooks that offer the most powerful training information on the planet.

## **Tip 7: Avoid Toxins**

Cigarette smoking is a strong risk factor for heart disease. Toxins in cigarette smoke have been shown to damage the vascular wall and may precipitate plaque formation. Smoking only one cigarette a day significantly increasing the risk of heart attack over a non-smoker.

Never just “try” a cigarette. It is highly likely you will develop a life long bad habit. Cigarette smoking is extremely addicting. About 33% of those who try cigarettes become addicted.

Smoking is one of the worst things you can do for your health. It is associated with many toxins and chemicals that can damage the body. The most well known toxin is nicotine. About 2 mg of nicotine is absorbed per cigarette smoked.

Smoking is associated with many diseases including heart disease, stroke, emphysema and multiple types of cancer. Quitting smoking is one of the most important steps you can take to improve quality and quantity of life.

Smoking the number one cause of death and disability across the world. Approximately 25% of deaths in the United States are tobacco related.

When you smoke you are not only harming yourself but others around you. Second hand smoke is one of the biggest risk factors for ear infections, asthma exacerbations and lower respiratory tract infections

It is believed that drinking 1 drink a day for the female and 2 per day for men reduces the risk of heart disease. Drinking more than this amount has the potential to increase you risk of not only heart disease but also many other diseases.

Excessive alcohol use can lead to:

- Physiological dependence on alcohol
- Increased risk of cancer of the breasts, stomach, head and neck
- Liver damage
- Fetal malformations if alcohol is drunk during pregnancy
- Depression

- Increased risk of car accidents
- Increased risk of falls
- Increased risk of homicide/suicide
- Increased risk of drowning
- Risky behaviors made while judgment is impaired which can lead to many problems including pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease or legal trouble.

The complete elimination of tobacco products and limited use or abstinence of alcohol significantly reduces the risk of many problems.

[Quit Smoking Today](#) – If you are a smoker that wants to kick to habit for good, this is the most important message you will ever read! Are you sick of trying to quit smoking by using patches, gum, sprays or pills...that fail everytime? Kick the habit – Today.

[Give up Alcohol in 30 Days of less.](#) How you can stop or control your drinking using healthy, safe and little known life-changing techniques.

### **[Drug Alcohol Addiction Recovery Workbook - Addiction Self Help](#)**

This workbook is based on success. If you have tried traditional treatment and still don't understand why you can't stop alcohol or drugs, or if you are attempting to quit for the first time, this workbook can help.

## Tip 8: Vaccinate: Its Not Just for Kids

Vaccinations protect the body against common infectious diseases. They are used to prevent disease, decrease the severity of disease and decrease death. Most immunizations are given during the developmental years but there are some immunizations that are given to adults, especially older adults. Important vaccinations in older adults include the influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine, tetanus/diphtheria vaccine and the shingles vaccine.

Adults are candidates for other vaccinations. This includes immunization against hepatitis A & B. Hepatitis A immunization may be needed in those with diseases of the blood or liver, those who travel to areas that have high rates of hepatitis A or those who have sex with more than one person.

Hepatitis B immunization may be needed in the older adult who is receiving hemodialysis, those who are exposed to blood products, inject drugs intravenously, and those who have sex with more than one partner or those with a sexual transmitted disease.

Immunization against Mumps, Measles and Rubella (MMR) may be needed in people born after 1957 that have not had 2 immunizations with MMR or documented immunity to the diseases.

Tetanus/Diphtheria (Td) booster should be given every 10 years. Tetanus is a bacterium that enters the skin and affects the central nervous system resulting in difficulty swallowing, drooling, fever, irritability, convulsions, respiratory or cardiac arrest and death. Diphtheria, a respiratory disease that is spread by coughing or sneezing, can be fatal. This immunization reduces the incidence of these two potentially fatal diseases.

Individuals who have never had a Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) are a candidate for a one-time dose of this vaccination in place of the Td. The main difference between the Td and the Tdap is the addition of the pertussis part of the vaccination. Pertussis is the bacterium responsible for whooping cough.

Influenza vaccines decrease death rates and hospitalizations during flu season. They should be given every year in the fall. Influenza or flu can be deadly in the older population and immunization is recommended in patients over the age of 50 or those with chronic diseases such as heart disease, lung disease,

kidney disease and diabetes. Chronic diseases that increase risk of death when inflicted with influenza include chronic lung disease, heart disease and diabetes. It should not be given to individual who are allergic to eggs or egg products.

The pneumococcal vaccine should be given to everyone over the age of 65. It should also be given (after the age of 65) to anyone who had the vaccine more than five years before turning 65. It should also be administered to patients with diabetes, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), those without a spleen, or those afflicted with chronic lung, kidney, heart or liver disease.

The most recently developed vaccine that is recommended for the older adult is the shingles vaccine. It is recommended to be given at the age of 60.

Vaccinations are critically important in staving off disease. In today's health care environment, many people are not up to date on their vaccinations. For more information on vaccinations visit <http://www.cdc.gov> or <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com> or check out *Don't Get Sick: Seven Steps to Optimal Preventative Health Care*.

**To find out more about the swine flu check out these great resources**

[How to Survive Pandemic Flu](#) – All you need to know about the swine flu

[Prevent Swine Flu](#) – Protect your family and be prepared for the swine flu

## Tip 9: Ten Steps to Prevent a Cold

Children get between 2 to 9 colds each year. Adults have between 2 and 4 colds each year. While it is almost impossible to prevent yourself from ever getting a cold, there are multiple things you can do to reduce the risk.

Below are 10 steps that can reduce the risk of getting a cold.

1. Get a flu shot. There is evidence that the flu shot not only prevents the flu, but also may decrease the risk of getting a virus that is similar to the flu.
2. Wash your hands. Probably the most important thing you can do. During cold and flu season try to wash your hands multiple times a day. If you are out in public, carry a small alcohol based cleanser and use it regularly.
3. Use a tissue when you cough and do not cough into your hands. If you do not have a tissue and you have to cough or sneeze, do it into your arm.
4. Stay away from sick people. Sick people populate health care settings.
5. Exercise and eat well. A fit, healthy, well-nourished body is much less likely to get sick.
6. Drink water.
7. Stop smoking. Smoke dries the respiratory tract and destroys the hair like projections that help the body get rid of germs.
8. Sleep well – lack of sleep increases the risk of getting a cold and impairs recovery from colds.
9. Use a virus killing disinfectant. Disinfect items commonly touched as viruses can live on surfaces for hours and sometimes for longer.
10. Use nasal saline regularly – especially in the winter or low humidity environments.

For more information on how to prevent colds and treat common health problems check out the book *Cough, Sneeze, Sniffle: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems* at <http://www.mini-medicalschoools.com>

## **Tip 10: Manage Chronic Disease**

Chronic disease, defined as disease that persists, causes about 70 percent of deaths in the United States. The impact of chronic disease will continue to increase as the population ages. Arthritis, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, lung disease, Alzheimer's disease, depression, diabetes and osteoporosis are common chronic diseases that lead to depression, disability and death.

Chronic disease is very common - one hundred and thirty-three million Americans live with at least one chronic disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Many other chronic diseases contribute to heart disease such as high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Those with chronic disease need to live as healthily as possible and understand their disease. Those who understand their disease will be better able to partner with the health care system to assure chronic disease is being managed properly. Proper management of a disease is not the sole responsibility of the doctor or the patient, but a team effort.

Chronic disease affects everyone differently; each individual needs to understand how the disease affects him or her personally. Having a basic understanding of the disease is a good step, but only a starting point.

### **Acute versus Chronic disease**

Acute health problems typically begin suddenly with a single cause, are of short duration and respond to a specific treatment. With the resolution of the acute illness normal health typically returns. Diagnosis of acute health problems is typically easy. Diagnostic testing is helpful in determining the cause of the problem. The health care provider is instrumental in diagnosing and treating the illness.

Common examples of acute illnesses are pneumonia, appendicitis or a urinary tract infection. Pneumonia is usually of sudden onset, caused by bacteria, easily diagnosed and treated with antibiotics. After treatment and cure of the disease a return to normal life is typical.

Chronic health problems are slow in onset and progressive. The disease often lingers on with no ending and cure is rare. The health care professional's role is to partner with the patient to help manage the disease.

The patient's role is much more important in the management of chronic disease when compared to acute illness. Without management of the chronic condition the disease will progress and disability and death will ensue.

Chronic disease causes many problems. Individuals need to partner with the health care system to actively manage them. Individuals should not count on the health care system to take sole responsibility for managing the disease.

Becoming knowledgeable about disease is an important part of having a successful health care experience. Individuals must have a basic understanding of his or her disease. The better the individual understands the diseases the better they can partner in their medical care.

No one has a greater interest vested in your well being than you. Physicians manage very busy office practices and may overlook some important aspects of your care. It is imperative that you help your health care providers give you the care that is needed to prevent death and disability.

**Check out the book: Don't Get Sick Seven Steps to Optimal Preventative Health Care available at <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com>**

## Tip 11: Understand Risk Factors for Heart Disease

Heart disease, which affects 13 million Americans, is the number one killer of Americans and significantly contributes to disability. These numbers may be even higher because much heart disease goes unrecognized. Minimizing the risk factors is a critical part of reducing your risk of death and disability.

Many factors increase the risk of developing heart disease. Some of the risk factors are modifiable – or ones you can change – some are not.

Non-modifiable risk factors are factors that if present increase your risk for heart disease and there is no intervention that will change them.

A positive family history includes having a first degree relative with heart disease. A first-degree relative is a parent, sibling or child. It is considered a particularly strong risk factor if your family member had an onset of disease before age 50.

Gender is another risk factor for heart disease. Males have a higher risk for heart disease at a younger age. Men and women are at equal risk for heart disease at the age of 70 and beyond.

Age is the last non-modifiable risk factor. The older one becomes the more at risk he or she is for heart disease.

Modifiable risk factors are traits you can change to reduce your risk of heart disease. These are the most important risk factors to understand as controlling these risk factors will reduce the risk of heart disease.

**Cholesterol:** Controlling blood cholesterol reduces death, heart disease and strokes. Cholesterol and smoking are considered the top two cardiovascular risk factors. Optimizing cholesterol levels delays heart disease and reduces its complications.

Three subtypes of cholesterol are reported on a lipid panel. Total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dl. The low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is the most damaging cholesterol particle. This is the one that can result in the most benefit from lowering – the lower the LDL the better. Most recent guidelines recommend if you have heart disease or are at high risk for heart disease that values should be less than 100 mg/dl and patients who are very

high risk should have values less than 70 mg/dl.

The high-density lipoprotein (HDL) is considered the good cholesterol. The HDL cholesterol takes the LDL cholesterol away from the vessel where it does the most damage. The minimum number that should be achieved is 50 mg/dl – the higher the better.

When assessing cholesterol it is important to look at the LDL and HDL cholesterol to determine risk of disease. The total cholesterol is not correlated with heart disease as well as the components of cholesterol.

Triglycerides are another number reported on the lipid panel. The role of triglycerides is less clear in the development of heart disease. It is recommended that the people strive to achieve triglyceride levels less than 150 mg/dl.

**Diabetes:** Having diabetes puts you at increased risk for heart disease.

Diabetes is a condition where high levels of sugar are in the blood. Blood sugar is high because the body is unable to use insulin or does not create enough insulin. Both high levels of blood sugar and levels of insulin can damage the blood vessels in the body contributing to the development of heart disease.

**Hypertension:** High blood pressure puts you at increased risk for heart disease. Optimal goals include reducing the blood pressure to less than 120/80 mm Hg. Elevated systolic blood pressure (top number), which is more common in the older population, is correlated more with heart disease than increases in the diastolic blood pressure (bottom number).

**Physical inactivity:** Lack of exercise is a clear risk for heart disease. Exercise can affect a variety of other risk factors. Regular exercise has been shown to decrease blood pressure, raise HDL cholesterol and decrease insulin resistance (a factor associated with diabetes).

**Smoking:** Cigarette smoking is a strong risk factor for heart disease. Toxins in cigarette smoke have been shown to damage the vascular wall and may precipitate plaque formation. Smoking only one cigarette a day significantly increasing the risk of heart attack over a non-smoker.

**Stress:** Chronic daily stress increases your risk for heart disease.

**Abdominal obesity:** A waist circumference of greater than 32 inches in females

and 34 inches in men is a predictor of heart attack. Weight gain negatively affects many of the other risk factors for heart disease. The direct effect of obesity on the risk for heart disease is a question of debate but weight gain increases the risk of insulin resistance, blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol.

**Eating few fruits and vegetables:** Fruits and vegetables have antioxidants and fiber that are protective against heart disease.

**Drinking too much alcohol:** It is believed that drinking 1 drink a day for the female and 2 per day for men reduces the risk of heart disease. Drinking more than this amount has the potential to increase your risk of not only heart disease but also many other diseases.

**High level of blood homocysteine:** This is a relatively new risk factor. High levels of this chemical have been shown to increase the risk of vascular events. These levels can be reduced with the addition of folic acid, vitamins B6 and B12. Homocysteine levels are higher in patients with cardiovascular disease and they may damage the vascular wall making it more likely to develop plaque.

**Inflammation:** Another relatively new risk factor, high levels of inflammation, can increase your risk for heart disease. A test that is often run to detect this is the high sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP).

For more information on chronic disease including heart disease visit [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) or check out *Chronic Disease Guide: How to Prevent and Treat Common Chronic Diseases*.

[How to Prevent & Even Reverse HEART DISEASE- Without Drugs or Surgery!](#)

This is the **ONLY anti-heart disease** 200-page Special Report on the web written by a former **cardiologist/surgeon** ... who now reveals the real truth to you! Don't trust your life to some ghostwriter. Get the real facts on how to **reverse or prevent heart disease** here.

## **Tip 12: Use the Web to Improve Your Care**

Health care responsibility is the act of taking control of the health care that you receive. It requires: **knowledge**, **organization**, and **communication**. Being knowledgeable about your own health is accomplished partially through study and reading but also through organization of your health care information. When health care information is organized, it is easily communicated.

You need to understand your health and disease. Understanding your health requires you have a full understanding of your past medical history, past surgical history, medications, allergies to medication, your history of medical tests, hospitalization history, and health care wishes.

Having a full understanding of any health conditions will help assure that they are cared for properly. Diseases are complicated and proper care is challenging at best. Disease management is made even more challenging in today's health care setting. Rushed health care providers do not have the time to properly care for those with chronic diseases.

Understanding your diseases also means that you know where to find resources. Many things can be done to assure you understand your disease. This includes reading books, talking to your doctor and of course visiting the World Wide Web.

Quality web sites enhance your knowledge of the latest research on the diseases. Below I have listed a number of reputable websites to provide quality health care information.

One concerning thing about the Internet, is that anyone can get a website. So anyone can put anything on the Internet. It is therefore critical that each website that you look at is evaluated for quality.

### **Resources**

**Mini-Medical School Website** – <http://www.mini-medicalschoo.com>

Sign up for the free newsletter on this website it will be emailed to you periodically. It will include the latest medical information to help the health care consumer assume health care responsibility.

**Medlineplus** - <http://www.medlineplus.gov>

This is a great website that is updated daily that provides information on the most recent medical breakthroughs. Easy to read articles are posted daily and are broken down by topic.

**National Institute of Health** - <http://www.nih.gov>

This site is run by the National Institute of Health and provides information on a variety of health conditions, healthy lifestyles, child and teen health as well as senior health.

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** - [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)

This is a website that provides information on breaking medical news and a variety of health topics. It also provides a variety of personal health tools to help you improve your health.

**InteliHealth** - <http://www.intelihealth.com>

This website provides a multitude of tools to enhance health. It offers updates on breaking medical news, information on diseases, information on dental health and drug resources. It also provides tools to enhance understanding of health conditions.

**Mayo Clinic** - <http://www.mayoclinic.org>

Run by the world famous Mayo Clinic, this website provides health care information on a variety of health care topics that are reviewed by world-class doctors.

**RxList** – <http://www.rxlist.com>

A reliable website that provides information about medications.

**WebMD** <http://www.webmd.com>

This is one of the most comprehensive websites. It provides reliable, easy to read medical information on almost any topic.

This is a listing of a few good websites, but there are many other good ones. Use the World Wide Web to enhance your knowledge of how to care for yourself.

## **Tip 13: Avoiding Problems in the Hospital**

The Institute of Medicine estimates that 44,000 to 98,000 Americans die each year by mistakes in the hospital. In addition to death, other complications and increased health care costs contribute to the dire state of the American hospital system. Complications, including errors, cost the American health care system billions of dollars each year.

Hospitalization is typical and often necessary when individuals are acutely ill, but it is fraught with risks. Hospitalization is not always required to treat disease, but at other times it is the only way to go, as many disease states cannot be managed without extensive monitoring and testing.

The hospital is a dangerous place. The risks of hospitalization can be subdivided into complications of hospitalizations, errors and iatrogenic disease. Complications are occurrences that result from some aspect of the hospitalization. Errors are mistakes that doctors, nurses or other staff members commit. Iatrogenic disease, defined as disease produced by doctors or other health care workers, runs rampant in the hospital.

You may be thinking, "Doctors don't cause disease". Yes they do. It is extremely rare that they would do this purposely but doctors and health care providers frequently cause disease unintentionally. Common examples of iatrogenic disease include infections, side effect or complications of a medication, or complications from a diagnostic procedure such as major bleeding or kidney failure.

Some errors are just mistakes that you cannot do anything about no matter how knowledgeable, attentive or careful you are. On the other hand, many errors can be over come by being an informed consumer of health care, asking questions and trusting your instincts. It is important to take responsibility while in the hospital to reduce the risk of complications. An educated and prepared patient is the best protection against medical error.

The first step in preventing medical errors in the hospital is to ask your doctor about the possibility of being treated at home. Many times hospitalization is necessary, but there are times when being treated as an outpatient is possible.

Avoiding the hospital reduces the risk of complications, errors and adverse events.

Family support is an important part of getting through the hospital experience with the best possible outcome. Family and friends can be an advocate for you.

Medical errors are common - and at times fatal - in the hospital. To prevent errors and help the health care team - keep your own personal chart.

Hospitalized patients are often not well enough to keep great notes on their illness so it often requires a family member to help in this process.

Your hospital chart is nothing more than a couple pieces of paper where key information is recorded. The personal hospital chart includes seven sections to monitor and follow your hospital course. The form is found in at [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) in the book *Improve Your Communication: How Talking Can Improve Health Care*.

### **Key points**

Below is a listing of the important steps to improve your health care while in the hospital.

- Avoid hospital care if possible.
- Bring your personal health record – which includes your medication list.
- Keep your own medical chart.
- Insist that the doctors, nurses, aids, laboratory workers or anyone who cares for you washes their hands.
- Be nice to the nursing staff.
- Assign a patient advocate, typically a family member or close friend.
- Have frequent visitors.
- If there is a problem, voice it assertively but be kind. Show appreciation if it is remedied properly.
- Know your rights.
- Know who is in charge – record the name of the charge nurse.
- Get a private room if possible.
- At discharge, get your list of discharge medicines and compare them to the medications received in the hospital. Discuss any discrepancies with staff before leaving the hospital.

Learning how to communicate is a key fact to preventing complications in the hospital. Information to prevent errors in the hospital are available at <http://www.minimedicalschool.com>.

## Tip 14: Understand Over the Counter Medications

With the advent of so many different over the counter medications and products, it sometimes feels like you need a PhD in order to figure out how to use a drug store safely.

In order to use a drug store safely you need to take an active role in understanding your health conditions, medication allergies and medications you are on. Over the counter medications and home remedies can very successfully manage many health conditions, but you need to understand them.

Individuals with certain disease states are at higher risk for complications with certain over the counter medications. For example, individuals with high blood pressure are at increased risk to have complications from elevated blood pressure after taking an over the counter decongestant. It is important that if you are afflicted with high blood pressure or any form of cardiovascular disease that you are aware which products may do damage to the body.

Over the counter treatments and home remedies can go along way to promote comfort when you are sick. You just need need to understand how to use them. Resources are available to help you understand how to use over the counter medications. Check out *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

Fever is a common problem that is seen in many common illnesses. Ibuprofen and acetaminophen are two primary medications used to manage fever.

Aspirin is sometimes taken, but should not be used in those with a viral illness. Aspirin is especially dangerous in children as it increases the risk of Reye's syndrome (a rare neurological disease). As a general rule do not give aspirin to anyone under under 20-years-old.

Cough is an annoying problem that drives many people to use over the counter medications. In addition to increasing hydration and using humidification, the use of medicatons to help loosen cough and get rid of mucus may help.

Guaifenesin (found in the product Mucinex) can be helpful in helping the body get rid of extra mucus.

When cough interferes with sleep or is causing extreme discomfort the use of cough suppressants may be indicated. Reducing cough can be accomplished with multiple medications including: dextromethorphan polistirex (Delsym) and dextromethorphan (Robitussin – DM).

Nasal decongestants are very helpful in managing a stuffy nose. There are many products available to help with nasal congestion.

1. Oral medications
2. Topical medications
3. Vapor medications

Oral medications are pills taken by mouth. Examples include pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) and phenylephrine (Sudafed PE). These medications work by constriction blood vessels in the nose.

One unfortunate side effect is that they constrict vessels not only in the nose, but also all over the body. Therefore, they can increase blood pressure and should be used with caution in anyone with heart disease, high blood pressure or any other cardiovascular condition. In addition they should be used with caution by anyone with diabetes, thyroid problems, or prostate problems.

Topical decongestants can also be used to unblock the nose. These are medications that are sprayed directly up the nose and act locally. Unfortunately, some of the medication can leak into the blood and act systemically. This means that topical medications can also increase blood pressure. Therefore, the same risks associated with oral decongestants apply to the topical decongestants.

The other major complication of topical decongestants is rebound congestion. The use of topical decongestants for more than three to five days can lead to congestion that becomes difficult to break up without persistent use of the same topical decongestants. Therefore, only use topical decongestants for three days.

Vapor decongestants are not as potent as the other two brands of decongestants, but are the safest medications to use in those with heart disease.

For more information on over the counter medications and how to use them properly check out *Cough, Sneeze, Sniffle: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems* at <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com>

To purchase products discussed in this chapter visit [The Drug Store](#). It is critical to keep a supply of over the counter medicines at home on hand. You never know when you are going to get sick.

## Tip 15: Water: Its Role in Upper Respiratory Tract Symptoms

Common symptoms of the upper respiratory tract include: runny nose, nasal congestion and sore throat. Treatment of these conditions includes both medication and non-medication methods to relieve symptoms. Rest and hydration should be employed in those with upper respiratory tract symptoms.

Water is a key component to managing these symptoms. The main ways to use water are to: drink more water, use nasal saline, and use humidification/vaporization.

Drinking fluids helps the body thin and get rid of mucus. Fluid will also help prevent dehydration, which is especially important in someone with a fever.

Fever increases the body's need for water. It is therefore important to increase fluid intake in the face of fever. Adults should focus on increasing plain water, but any non-alcoholic or non-caffeinated beverage will do. Infants should increase intake of breast milk or formula or an electrolyte replacement beverage such as Pedialyte.

Utilization of humidity should improve symptoms. A hot shower or a cool-mist vaporizer may help provide some relieve. Humidification is helpful in loosening congestion. A cool-mist vaporizer is very helpful to run at night. When nasal congestion is prominent, the use of steam showers can help open nasal passages. Applying a warm washcloth over the sinuses may ease pressure in the face.

Nasal saline improves runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throats, cough and the number of sick days in children with cold symptoms<sup>i</sup>. Salt-water gargles can relieve a sore throat that accompanies sinus infections. Multiple over the counter products are available for the relief of sore throats.

For more information on how to improve symptoms associated with common diseases and to improve the quality of your health care visit [www.mini-medicalschool.com](http://www.mini-medicalschool.com) or check out *Cough, Sneeze, Sniffle: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

**To purchase nasal saline and other products discussed in this chapter visit [The Drug Store](#).**

Medical supplies and health products such as vaporizers can be found at: can be found at [CWI Medical – Medical Supplies and Health Care Products](#).

## **Tip 16: Keep a Cold Kit**

The cold kit is a little box with supplies and medicines to help relieve the symptoms of a cold. I highly recommend that everyone keep a box with these products at home.

Over the counter medications are very effective in the healthy individual over the age of 12. Over the counter medications are associated with some risk and lack of benefit in some individuals. There is risk in older adults with multiple medical problems. In addition, there is risk with younger children. If you fall in one of these groups make sure you pay particular attention to the risks associated with any medication that you take.

In addition, there is not only risk but also lack of effectiveness for many over the counter medications in children. Many of the medications are associated with minimal benefit, if any, and some are associated with risk. If you are caring for a child less than 12-years-old, attempt to use as many of the safe and proven interventions before using over the counter medications that lack proven safety or benefit. These include providing rest, hydration, humidification (with a cool mist humidifier), nasal saline and pain relievers/fever reducers.

If you use other medications monitor for effectiveness. If they do not seem to be helping do not use them.

The content of the cold kit will depend on the age of the person the kit is for. Over the counter medications come in different forms; some medications are liquid, some are chewable and some are pills. Usually, adults like to take pills whereas children use chewable or liquid medication.

I suggest products that have one active ingredient. Products that have multiple ingredients are more complicated to use and are more likely to give you medication that you do not need and more likely to give you side effects or negative effects.

The cold kit is broken down into multiple medications. When you have a cold you should increase fluids, rest, use a cool mist humidifier and nasal saline. If these interventions do not manage your symptoms add a dose of the medication that will treat the symptoms that are most affecting you. For example, if you are

most affected by nasal congestion, than the nasal decongestant, pseudoephedrine can be taken. If you are most affected by a dry cough than the addition of guaifenesin will most likely provide you with some relief.

#### *Checklist*

- Cool mist humidifier
- Nasal saline
- Suction bulb – if you have a child who cannot blow the nose (usually children can start to effectively blow their nose at about four years of age)
- Ibuprofen (pills, chewable or liquid)
- Acetaminophen (pills, chewable or liquid)
- Measuring spoon
- Nasal decongestants (use if nasal saline, a cool mist humidifier and steam do not improve congestion). Consider both topical and oral products. If you have a contraindication to these products consider the vapor decongestant.
- Expectorants should be used if there is mucus that you cannot expel – either in the chest or in the head. The primary over the counter expectorant is guaifenesin (Mucinex).
- Cough suppressants should be used only if up at night coughing or coughing is causing significant discomfort. Consider over the counter products such as dextromethorphan polistirex (Delsym) and dextromethorphan (Robitussin - DM).
- Antihistamines should be used only if you are sneezing, have a runny nose and/or itchy eyes.
- A sore throat product of choice should be kept on hand.
- Nasal strips can be helpful for people with significant nasal congestion as it widens the nasal passage and helps breathing.

For more information on the cold kit visit <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com> and check out the book *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

**To purchase products to make your cold kit discussed in this chapter visit [The Drug Store](#).**

Medical supplies and other health products can be found at: can be found at  
[CWI Medical – Medical Supplies and Health Care Products.](#)

## Tip 17: Self-manage Disease

The patient's role is critical when it comes to common acute health care problems. Running to the doctor every time you get the sniffles is wasteful of your time and your money. On the other hand, if you do not manage the symptoms properly you are at risk for complications.

Patients go to the doctor in acute illnesses for four reasons. These include:

- To feel better
- To know what is wrong
- To feel reassured when the doctor tells them what is wrong
- Antibiotics

Many times health care consumers can accomplish these goals without running to the doctor. Health care consumers need to make it their business to understand common diseases or they risk sub-optimal health care. When confronted with an acute illness the book *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Primary Care for Common Health Problems* will help you be able to:

- Utilize home remedies and the drug store to feel better
- Understand what is wrong
- Feel reassured of what is going on
- Understand when you need antibiotics – which, is not most of the time
- Understand when you need to go to the doctor

Getting good health care falls directly on the head of the consumer. Many people would argue that this is the doctor's responsibility, but it is not his responsibility alone. Doctor and patient have a co-responsibility to manage disease.

## **Tip 18: Ten Steps to Manage Allergies**

Allergies affect the lives of 40-50 million Americans every year. Control of allergens (things that cause allergies) can significantly improve quality of life and reduce the amount of medications necessary to control the condition.

Below are 10 steps that you can consider to help manage allergens.

1. Know what you are allergic to. Certain factors trigger allergies. Figuring out what the exact trigger is will help manage the symptoms. Primarily, when you know what causes the allergies, you will know how to avoid that trigger. Sometimes it is not that easy. When one is allergic to grass pollen in the spring, the only way to completely avoid the allergen is to stay inside. This is not a practical strategy. Those who are affected by allergens that cannot be avoided may need medications to control their symptoms. Common allergens to consider include: mold spores, animals, grass, smoke, pollution and outdoor pollens.
2. Maintain an allergy log. A copy of an allergy log is available from <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com>. This is a tool that will allow you to track your symptoms in relation to the time of the day, activity, where you are at and how effective medications are at controlling symptoms.

### **If you have predominantly outdoor allergies**

3. Monitor pollen counts. You can use the website <http://www.pollen.com>. Certain days are more problematic than others. Sunny, dry days tend to be associated with higher pollen counts. This typically translates into worse allergy symptoms. Extra precautions should be taken during these days.
4. Remain indoors with doors and windows closed and the air conditioning on to cool the home if needed. While this is not practical all of the time it is especially important on days with high pollen counts.
  - When driving, roll up the windows and use the air conditioner.
  - High efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters should be used on the air conditioning units and heating vents. Air filters and air ducts should be cleaned regularly.

- Outdoor air-drying laundry can increase the amount of allergens on the clothes, so using indoor methods to dry clothes is preferable.
- After being outside, bathing may help reduce the amount of pollen on the body.

**If you have predominantly indoor allergies**

5. Keep the bedroom as free of allergens as possible as this is the room that can most easily lead to problems.

- Wash the bedding every week in hot water
  - Vacuum the mattress
  - Place impermeable covers on the bed – such as plastic
  - No pets in the bedroom
  - Remove carpet from the bedroom and other rooms, if possible
  - Use high-efficiency particulate air filters
  - When vacuuming or dusting wear a mask or get someone without allergies to do these tasks
  - Wash pets frequently
  - Brush pets outside only
  - Get rid of indoor plants. Indoor plants may have mold or other allergens hidden in the soil.
6. No smoking. Tobacco smoke is a major irritant to the lungs and contributes to allergies. Not only should you not smoke, but also you should not be around smoke or in places where others smoke.
7. If you use a rug, use one made of synthetic fibers.
8. Filter dust particles. Use an air cleaner or air purifier.
9. Reduce mold/mildew. The bathroom is a common place for mold and mildew to live. Reducing humidity, by assuring proper fans and vents is helpful. In addition, cleaning shower curtains and walls with a product such as Lysol mold will reduce the amount of mold/mildew.
10. Learn about how you use over the counter allergy medications.

Much more information can be learned about how you can manage your allergies including how to utilize over the counter allergy medications to control

allergies at <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com> in the book *Cough, Sneeze and Sniffle: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems*.

**To purchase medicines to manage allergies discussed in this chapter visit [The Drug Store](#).**

**Medical supplies and other health products can be found at: can be found at [CWI Medical – Medical Supplies and Health Care Products](#).**

## **Tip 19: Understand when Antibiotics are Needed**

Antibiotics are overused. Multiple reasons exist to explain why antibiotics are given more often than they are needed. Some examples include the health care provider:

- Is unaware that an antibiotic is not the ideal treatment.
- Often underestimates the harm that can come from antibiotics.
- Is unaware of the cause of the symptoms and consequently treats the patient to avoid missing a bacterial cause of the symptoms and risk the development of complications.
- Gives into pressure from patients or perceived pressure from patients. Patients who ask for an antibiotic or give off clues that an antibiotic is what they desire are more likely to get one. Patients often feel that an antibiotic is the reason that they made an appointment. If they do not get an antibiotic they feel that they have wasted their time and money. Clinicians do not want to disappoint patients and often cater to their needs.

Antibiotics should not be used for the common cold, unfortunately they often are. Antibiotics – while they may appease the person who goes to the doctor for the cold – do not enhance illness resolution. Upper respiratory tract infections are the second most common reason antibiotics are prescribed.

Another common misconception is that antibiotics will prevent a cold from becoming a sinus infection. This is not true.

The main diagnostic challenge for the clinician is differentiating the common cold from sinus infections. A sinus infection is rarely present unless symptoms have persisted beyond 10 to 14 days.

Appropriate use of antibiotics will result in fewer adverse events, less antibiotic resistance and more effective future use of antibiotics. Patients and health care providers alike have a responsibility to use antibiotics safely and judiciously.

Doctors are more prone to prescribe an antibiotic to patients who they think expect them, but they do a poor job determining who expects them. Doctor's

only identify about 25% of patients who expect antibiotics<sup>ii</sup>. Therefore, health care consumers should not demand antibiotics for every illness.

Consumers are not trained health care providers, but they ideally should have a general grasp of clinical guidelines for common health care problems. Many people may argue with this statement, but I think it is critical. If you understand what science has shown about the use of antibiotics, you will be less likely to place pressure on clinicians to prescribe antibiotics. Health care providers are highly influenced by the patient's desire.

The American public needs a re-education. Over the last 60 years, antibiotics have become a remedy of far too many illnesses. People are misinformed about their use and under informed about their risk. This puts the health care system in extreme jeopardy.

More information on common health care problems and the use of antibiotics can be found at <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com> or in the books *Cough, Sneeze, Sniffle: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Care Problems* and *Guide to Antibiotics Prescribed in Your Doctor's Office*.

**To purchase products discussed in this chapter visit [The Drug Store](#).**

Medical supplies and health products can be found at: can be found at [CWI Medical – Medical Supplies and Health Care Products](#).

## **Tip 20: Understand Prescription Medications**

Medications are the number one weapon used by doctors to fight disease. While they are very effective at combating disease, there are often other options. Many diseases need to be managed with medications, but often lifestyle interventions - such as weight loss, exercise, smoking cessation and reducing the amount of alcohol consumed - are overlooked as viable treatment options by doctors.

Prescribing a medicine is an easier solution than spending time teaching the patient about lifestyle changes. Diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol are examples of diseases that can be treated with lifestyle interventions.

While lifestyle interventions are great treatment options for many diseases, they require work by both patient and physician. Lifestyle changes are difficult to make and many patients are unsuccessful at incorporating them into their lives. It also takes doctors a lot of time to teach these techniques and many feel that their efforts are fruitless. A doctor may argue, "Why should I spend all that time teaching about a lifestyle change that a person will likely not comply with, when I could prescribe a drug that would do the same thing and take up less of my time?"

Drugs cause people to get sick, especially the older population. Adverse drug reactions occur many times every day. It is estimated that 1.5 million people are admitted to the hospital and 100,000 deaths occur every year because of adverse drug reactions.

Common prescription medications include blood pressure medications, cholesterol medications and pain medications. All medications are associated with risk. As a health care consumer, it is important that you consider the risk of any medication that is prescribed to you.

One of the most commonly prescribed medications are antibiotics. Forty-five million antibiotics are prescribed each year<sup>iii</sup> and are often prescribed unnecessarily. Forty-four percent of those with a common cold, 75% of those with bronchitis and 46% of those with an upper respiratory tract infection are

given an antibiotic<sup>iv</sup>. Most of the time these condition do NOT require an antibiotic.

To expand a little further on the use of antibiotics in a doctor's office the main reasons antibiotics are given include:

- Ear infection – 22%
- Sore throat– 19%
- Sinus infections – 17%
- Upper respiratory tract infections – 17%
- Bronchitis – 17%

If you go to the doctor for any of these conditions, you are likely to be overprescribed an antibiotic. Most people who go to the doctor for one of these conditions do not need an antibiotic, but for reasons outlined above are often prescribed an antibiotic. A saavy health care consumer can manage many of these conditions without an antibiotic.

What is the solution? Become a health care consumer who understands common health problems. Information on all of these conditions and other common health care problems and how to manage them appropriately is outlined in the book: *Cough, Sniffle, Sneeze: How to Get Optimal Health Care for Common Health Problems* available at <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com>

## Summary

The current health care system is bad. You need to take charge of your health. This book outlined 20 tips that will get you started on your way to good health.

This is just a starting point, you need to educate yourself. You need to be an involved health care consumer. An educated, informed health care consumer will:

- Know how to communicate with the health care system
- Understand their medications
- Understand how to prevent disease
- Prevent common illnesses
- Prevent chronic illnesses
- Manage common health care problems with home remedies and over the counter medications
- Not overuse prescription drugs and use them correctly

Getting great health care is a journey. The current state of the health care system is not looking out for your best interest, it is looking to make money.

The news is not all bad. Resources are available for you to get great health care. You just have to be an informed, educated and prepared health care consumer.

To get great health care you must:

- a. Know your medical history
- b. Be able to communicate that history to the health care system
- c. Understand the diseases that afflict you and know how to monitor them
- d. Understand common illness and how to treat them and when to use the health care system to get them treated

- e. Know how to practice preventative medicine including what screening tests you need and when they are needed

To get great health care you have some work to do. The first step is educating yourself. For more information on how to be an educated, informed health care consumer visit <http://www.mini-medicalschool.com>. Plenty of resources are available there to help you understand how to tap the great health care system that is available.

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<sup>i</sup> Slapak I, Skoupa J, Strand P & Hornik P. Efficacy of Isotonic Nasal Wash (Seawater) in the Treatment and Prevention of Rhinitis in Children. *Archives of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery* 2008; 134; 67-74

<sup>ii</sup> Spurling GKP, Del Mar C, Dooley L & Foxlee R. Delayed Antibiotics for Respiratory Infections. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2007, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD004417.

<sup>iii</sup> Carmon M. Educating Parents about the Judicious use of Antibiotic in Children. 2008. Retrieved April 14, 2009. Available from: URL: <http://www.medscape.com>

<sup>iv</sup> Nyquist AC, Gonzales R, Steiner JF & Sande MA. Antibiotic Prescribing for Children with Colds, Upper Respiratory Tract Infections and Bronchitis. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1998; 279(11): 875-877.