

Three Tips to Help with the Challenges of Taking Care of Yourself

So you just left your primary care doctor's office with a plan. It could be filling a prescription and taking it as directed. Or you got the results of a cholesterol screening and worked out a healthy diet plan with your doctor. Now what?

Remember you have that plan because you've worked hard to build a strong relationship with your doctor. You've asked questions, listened, learned, and possibly even researched your health issue. Now it's time to follow through. And guess what? Tomorrow it will be time to follow through too.

It's not just about the idea of taking care of yourself. It's about *really* taking care of yourself every day. And it's not easy.

When it comes to taking care of yourself, and following through, what matters are the issues affecting you and what you do in response to them. Here are three tips:

Know that you're the expert on yourself, but only if you stay aware.

- Think of the times you've followed through on taking care of yourself. What do they have in common? Did you understand your plan better? Did you ask why you need a specific prescription?
- Then think of the times you haven't followed through. What's happening in those moments where you didn't take action? Maybe you forgot, so putting it in your calendar will help. Or maybe you didn't understand why the plan is right for you. But you hadn't followed up with your doctor about it.
- By focusing on yourself, you can start to see why you're not following through. Possibly you feel depressed or powerless. Or you may have a side effect from a prescription and stopped taking it. Whatever the case, you should be talking to your doctor.

Recognize that taking care of ourselves is a common challenge.

- You may leave your doctor's appointment with the best intentions of taking care of yourself. But later you may have a sense of disappointment (or failure) when you find yourself following old patterns. You're not alone.
- Get support from your health care team, and also reach out to family, friends and even patient networking groups and websites. You can connect with others and get ideas on how to face those challenges.

Make taking care of yourself habit-forming.

- We hear a lot about bad habits, but you can also create good ones. Focus on the benefits of taking care of yourself, such as that good feeling after exercise or a mini-vacation you're planning with the money you saved by giving up smoking.
- Taking care of yourself might not make you feel better in the moment. Be realistic about what you can expect from healthy habits and remember why you're doing them. Health isn't always about instant gratification, except the instant gratification from knowing you're taking care of yourself.

Taking care of yourself can feel like something you do alone, and on a day-to-day basis, it often is. It's you shopping for healthy food, you deciding to wake up 20 minutes early so you can fit in a walk before work, you keeping track of your medicines. And the challenges you face (and the rewards you experience) are your own. But you're not alone, because your primary care doctor is your partner in health. And one of the most important parts of your health is you, each moment, taking care of yourself.