

# MANAGING MULTIPLE CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,  
AND CAREGIVERS



## READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- Why it is Important to Manage Multiple Health Conditions.
- The Challenges with Managing Multiple Health Conditions.
- Strategies to Improve Self-Management of Health Conditions.



**Sinai  
Health**

Healthy Ageing  
and Geriatrics



**UHN**

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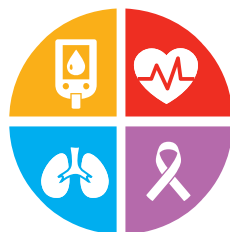


# WHAT ARE CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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As we grow older, we often develop diseases and conditions that last a long time, such as diabetes, heart or lung diseases and cancer. These chronic conditions are different from infectious diseases such as influenza or pneumonia because they cannot be passed from one person to another.

Many older adults, however, develop more than one chronic condition and are required to manage multiple chronic health conditions as they age.



While managing multiple chronic health conditions can be challenging, there are strategies to help you address the conditions and cope with the challenges they may cause.

Read this pamphlet to learn about issues of multiple chronic conditions, what you can do to manage them and resources that can support you.



# WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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Many older adults cope with a variety of chronic health conditions, but some are more prevalent than others. The most common chronic health conditions experienced as we age include:



Arthritis  
(50% of older Canadians)



High Blood Pressure  
(Hypertension)  
(47% of older Canadians)



Cardiovascular Disease  
(19% of older Canadians)



Diabetes  
(17% of older Canadians)



Cancer  
(12% of older Canadians)



COPD / Asthma  
(10% of older Canadians)

In Canada, 71% of older adults live with at least one chronic health condition, while 24% live with at least three.



# WHAT ARE COMMON COMBINATIONS OF CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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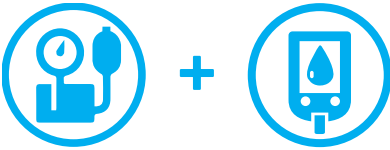
While older adults can live with many chronic conditions, there are some combinations of chronic conditions that are more common than others. The five most common combinations are:



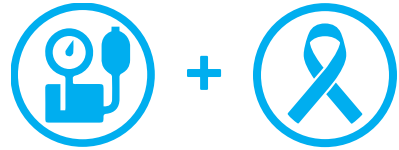
High Blood Pressure and Arthritis  
(14% of older Canadians)



High Blood Pressure and Cardiovascular Disease (12% of older Canadians)



High Blood Pressure and Diabetes (11% of older Canadians)



High Blood Pressure and Cancer (6% of older Canadians)



Cardiovascular Disease and Arthritis (6% of older Canadians)



# WHAT ARE THE ISSUES WITH MANAGING MULTIPLE CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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Managing multiple chronic health conditions can be a challenging task for older adults and their families and caregivers. Some common challenges with managing multiple conditions are:



## HAVING TO TAKE MULTIPLE MEDICATIONS

On average, older adults with three or more chronic health conditions take up to six medications. These medications can conflict with one another, as well as with the management of other chronic conditions. For example, medication for one condition can aggravate the symptoms of another condition for which another medication or treatment may be required. These multiple medications can pose significant health, as well as financial challenges.



## EXPERIENCING FRAGMENTED CARE

Many doctors are experts in one area, but few are experts in many areas. For older adults with multiple chronic health conditions, this can mean having to see several specialists separately. As a result, they have more frequent medical appointments and have greater self-care needs and can sometimes receive conflicting advice. It is best to work with your primary care provider and possibly a geriatrician to manage your conditions holistically with your personal care goals in mind.





### **EXPERIENCING GREATER HEALTH CARE USE**

Older adults with multiple chronic health conditions tend to use health services more frequently. Those that have at least three chronic health conditions use health care services three times more often than older adults with no chronic health conditions. Have your care plan regularly reviewed, adjusted and better coordinated to avoid having to use services more than is necessary.



### **EXPERIENCING POORER HEALTH**

As older adults deal with more chronic health conditions, their self-reported health status often declines. For example, among older adults who have no chronic health conditions, 92% report having excellent, very good or good health. Less than half of older Canadians with three or more chronic health conditions report feeling the same.



### **EXPERIENCING A REDUCED QUALITY OF LIFE**

As a result of all the challenges that come with having multiple chronic health conditions, older adults can face a reduced quality of life, ability to work and volunteer, and have a poorer self-reported health status. For many older patients, managing their chronic health conditions can bring fatigue, depression and pain. Strategies to manage chronic health conditions can ease these burdens.



# WHO CAN HELP YOU MANAGE LIVING WITH MULTIPLE CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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If you are managing multiple chronic health conditions, you will benefit from the support of an interprofessional team.

This may be comprised of a variety of professionals, but frequently include a doctor or geriatrician, nurse, social worker, pharmacist, physiotherapist or occupational therapist and home care coordinator.

Each of these professionals has unique knowledge and skills that can support you.



## PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

All older adults should try to have a primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) that can see to your overall needs and often provide good management of the common issues that may arise for people who live with multiple chronic health conditions. They can help coordinate referrals to specialist care providers as needed.



## NURSE

A primary or community care nurse can support you by providing education on your health conditions, helping you to manage your symptoms and coordinating follow-up medical and other appointments such as blood work.



## SOCIAL WORKER

A social worker can help you understand, link to and coordinate local, social and community supports and services such as social programs, counselling, housing, transportation, meal supports and home care services.





### **PHARMACIST**

A pharmacist is an expert in medications. They can also do medication reviews to ensure your medications are necessary and safe, as well as help you best manage taking multiple medications.



### **PHYSIOTHERAPIST**

A physiotherapist can help you to improve and maintain your physical function to remain as mobile and independent as possible and prevent functional decline.



### **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST**

An occupational therapist can assess how well you can complete your daily activities at home or in the community to ensure that your environment is designed to be supportive and appropriate and that you have the right aid to help you complete your tasks as independently as possible.



### **GERIATRICIAN**

A geriatrician is a specialist doctor who is trained to support the health needs of older patients, especially those who live with multiple chronic health conditions. Not every older adult will need to see a geriatrician.

While all of these professionals can support you, you should also take steps to learn about your chronic health conditions and adopt strategies to help manage your symptoms.



# WHAT ARE SOME STRATEGIES TO MANAGE MULTIPLE CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?

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Many older patients with multiple chronic health conditions struggle with balancing how best to live their lives with their illnesses. It is important to maintain a healthy perspective. Some older patients find that changing their view of their conditions helps them to manage them better. Prioritizing your conditions, regulating the amount of attention you pay to your situation, and reframing tasks as ways to maintain your independence and a meaningful life are effective ways to manage living with chronic health conditions.



Not having a strong social network can be a barrier to successfully managing multiple chronic health conditions; by the same token, having a strong social support system is invaluable. Having family, friends and caregivers in your life can empower you to manage your conditions and help motivate and support you to better care for yourself.



There are also steps you can take to ensure your health care providers are helping you to manage your chronic health conditions as best as possible.



- Use one pharmacy so that it can keep track of all your medications, and engage with your pharmacist to ensure you understand your medications.
- Avoid using walk-in clinics and try to work with one primary care provider who may be part of an interprofessional care team you can also work with.
- When you go to any medical appointment, bring a list of all your conditions and your actual medications with you.
- It's best to write down any questions you have in advance to ensure you do not forget what you need to ask and to ensure



that your questions are answered.

- Learn where you can find more information about your conditions and how they are best treated, as well as what each of your medications do and how best to take them.
- Make sure you know who and when to call for help as well.



People who have confidence in their ability to self-manage their conditions often have better health outcomes. The more you understand and can manage your conditions, the better you will be at it and the more confident you will be in your ability to manage your health in the future.



## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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### SINAI HEALTH SYSTEM GERIATRIC MEDICINE CLINICS

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Sinai Health System's Geriatric Medicine Clinics located at Mount Sinai Hospital provide comprehensive assessments and care planning recommendations and services; links to other specialist, primary, home and community services and programs; and ongoing follow-up, support, health education, and counselling as needed to enable healthy and active living.



<https://sinaigeriatrics.ca/services/mount-sinai-2/outpatient-geriatric-medicine-clinics/>

### UHN GERIATRIC MEDICINE CLINICS

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The University Health Network's Geriatric Medicine Clinics located at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute provide comprehensive assessments and care planning recommendations and services; links to other specialist, primary, home and community services and programs; and ongoing follow-up, support, health education, and counseling as needed to enable healthy and active living.

The Toronto Rehabilitation Institute also has a Geriatric Day Hospital that further provides additional specialized assessment and treatment programs for older adults with falls and other changes in function due to ageing and illness.



[https://www.uhn.ca/TorontoRehab/Clinics/Geriatric\\_Medicine](https://www.uhn.ca/TorontoRehab/Clinics/Geriatric_Medicine)



# NOTES





# NOTES





# NOTES





## RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

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- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Living Longer, Living Well: Your Guide to Healthy Ageing

### ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- A Guide to Vaccines for Older Adults
- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Managing Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing and Managing Diabetes in Older Persons
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Staying Active as You Age
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

### ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit [www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation](http://www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation) for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.



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