



# Just the Facts

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## Self-Care Fact Sheet for Health Care Professionals



### Purpose

Self-care is literally *taking care of yourself*. It is “the range of health-related decision making and care undertaken by individuals on their own behalf.” (See Reference 1.) It can involve any or all of the following activities:

- Health maintenance
- Illness prevention
- Symptom evaluation
- Self-diagnosis
- Getting friends to recommend providers
- Using alternative health care
- Using professional health care
- Self-treatment/self-medication

### Self-Care Decisions

People make self-care decisions when they:

- Decide what kind of first-aid supplies to keep at home.
- Use proper procedures to keep from spreading a cold.
- Choose what foods to eat.
- Choose a health care provider.
- Decide what to do about a child's fever.
- Decide whether an illness or injury needs immediate attention.
- Decide for or against risky behaviors.
- Design or choose a personal fitness program.

Some of these decisions are made with more care than others, depending on one's awareness of their relevance to health and fitness. Furthermore, the level of knowledge and skills on which decisions are based determines the appropriateness and cost of care received.

### Self-Care Knowledge and Resources

The provision of good self-care knowledge and resources contributes significantly to reducing the cost of health care. (See Reference 2.) Managed care systems pay providers for the number of beneficiaries served, regardless of how much care and how many services each one receives. Therefore, keeping people healthy is an important factor in containing the cost of health care.

- ◆ Taking Care of Yourself
- ◆ Teaching Self-Care
- ◆ Reduced Health Care Costs

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Teaching about self-care is part of every health promotion class or course. Participants receive additional knowledge that can help them make informed decisions. Some of the adjuncts to existing health promotion education that are frequently a part of managed care/Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) are:

- Self-care manuals.
- Nurse-advice telephone service.
- Interactive computer programs for clinic waiting rooms.
- Overview classes on self-care, health care consumerism, managed care services, and options.

In many ways, the individual is his or her own primary provider (or provider for his/her children). The ability to make appropriate decisions about health determines both the cost and effectiveness of health care consumption. Educators and clinicians can play a major role in preparing beneficiaries to be good self-care providers and health care consumers.

### ***References***

1. Dean, K. (1989). Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological Issues in Self-Care Research, *Social Science and Medicine*, 29(2), 117-123.
2. Opatz, J.P. (Ed.) (1994). *Economic Impact of Worksite Health Promotion*, Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics Publishers.