

YOU'RE THE BOSS

MANAGE YOUR DISEASE

Five Steps To Take
Charge of Your Health

GARY R. EPLER, M.D.

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Five Steps to Take Charge of Your Health

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Learn All You Can About Your Disease

How do you take charge? First, learn everything that you can about your disease and its natural course. What would happen if pills, surgery, or other medical interventions were not used?

Ask your doctor, but don't stop there. Explore Internet sites to discover which option is best for you. Send questions about the disease to discussion forums. You will find people all over the world with similar diseases. You'll be able to talk to people who have very rare diseases, even one in ten million. You'll find out how they manage their situations.

Over the years, the Internet has continued to play an important role in helping people to understand specific diseases. The first generation of the Internet allowed us to read about diseases. The second generation has allowed us to interact with other people who have the same diseases. The third generation is drawing on the collective knowledge of thousands of people to create new treatments and approaches to managing disease. Thanks to the Internet, it is easy to find up-to-date information about almost any disease.

Here is the story of Dr. Rhodes.

It had been a typical day, filled with work and enjoyable family activities for Dr. Rhodes, a prominent Massachusetts physician. Now he was looking forward to a relaxing evening with his family. Sadly, that wasn't to be. Suddenly, as he was finishing dinner with his wife, Myra, and his two children, Dawson and Genna, he felt a sharp, stabbing pain in the pit of his stomach. He finished the last bite of dessert, hoping to relieve the pain. Bad idea, it didn't work.

"It's indigestion," he grumbled to himself. He ignored the pain and helped the kids with their homework. The pain worsened relentlessly, traveling straight to his back. Sips of water and doses of antacids had no effect. Finally at midnight, he threw up.

Mercifully, the pain stopped. Dr. Rhodes dragged himself to bed and drifted off into a deep but short-lived sleep. Two hours later he awoke, doubled over with pain. Soon he was writhing on the bathroom floor, hugging the toilet bowl.

He awoke his wife and told her he was going to the twenty-four-hour drugstore for something stronger than antacid. By the time he returned home, the pain was unbearable, ten on a one-to-ten-point scale. By 6 a.m., chills had started. For the first time in his married life, he asked Myra, "Could you get me to the hospital?"

He threw up one more time, which gave him some relief. He and his wife then packed the kids into the car and dropped them off at school.

Dr. Rhodes endured the forty-minute drive to the hospital where he had his practice. By the time they arrived, he was in agony. He was bent over in pain as he walked down the hall to the observation unit, where he was put on a stretcher. Intravenous fluids were started.

It was nice to see a friendly face as the gastroenterologist—a co-worker—arrived. Then the surgeon, his good friend and colleague, showed up. Dr. Rhodes thought his friend had just stopped by to say hello.

“It’s gastritis,” Dr. Rhodes kept thinking to himself. Then, before he knew what was happening, the skilled hands of the surgeon began to examine his belly.

The doctors left the room. When they returned, the surgeon said, “You probably have a perforated ulcer.” Dr. Rhodes was in complete disbelief. An ulcer? He had never had an ulcer. He had never even had symptoms associated with an ulcer. He had always been in good health. Maybe the doctors were right. In medical school he had learned that a rigid abdomen and excruciating pain that went straight to the back were symptoms of an ulcer.

As Dr. Rhodes sat in a wheelchair, waiting to be taken for an X-ray, he had reached a desperate state. His abdomen was in a violent uproar. He was severely nauseated. He had chills. He thought he had developed an infection and was going into shock.

Turning to his wife, he said, “I feel like I’m dying.” Dramatically, he added, “If anything happens to me, promise you won’t let them put me on a breathing machine.”

Dr. Rhodes was in the first step of managing his disease: he was trying to learn as much as possible about it. In an acute, life-threatening situation, the first thing to do is to ask the doctor for information. In a chronic, ongoing situation, first ask the doctor, then search the Internet, go to online forums, read a book or an e-book, listen to a CD, or participate in an interactive program.

Learn everything that you can, and keep learning. The information will help you to control the situation and to make the decisions that are best for you.

Dr. Rhodes’s story will continue later.

Manage Your Disease and Your Health

This book tells you how to manage your disease and your health. You will learn the five cardinal steps of taking charge:

- Learn everything you can about the disease.
- Understand the diagnostic process.
- Know the risks and benefits of treatment.
- Establish a monitoring system.
- Create an environment to heal.

You can manage your disease better than anyone else. You can also successfully manage your health. You just need to know how.



The author, **Gary R. Epler, M.D.**, believes that people can manage their disease. Dr. Epler is an educator and a faculty member at Harvard Medical School. He discovered a parasite in South America, chronicled the nutritional needs of North African children, managed the tuberculosis refugee program in Southeast Asia, and was the first to describe an inflammatory lung disease called BOOP. Dr. Epler developed a plan for how people with this disease could successfully manage it themselves, and he has applied the principles in this book. Dr. Epler has published books about lung diseases and has written more than one hundred scientific articles. He is a frequent guest on radio and television.

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