



**Catholic  
Health**  
Physician  
Partners

# Take charge of your health

**Catholic Health makes it easy**



[chsli.org](https://chsli.org)

# Taking care of you and your family is our privilege.

Because your health is so important to us, Catholic Health has a program to take the stress out of health care. We call it the Take Charge program because it enables you to manage your health care needs with greater ease. Catholic Health gives you a dedicated phone number for prompt assistance: **(866) MY-LI-DOC.**

We understand that medical decisions can be difficult. This booklet will review some common screening suggestions as well as medical conditions that affect a good many of us as we get older. By understanding why certain tests and medications are recommended, you will be able to make informed, positive decisions that align with your individual health care goals.

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**Your provider is here to help you take care of yourself. By partnering, with your physician, you can significantly improve your quality of life for years to come. In essence, *you* are your best health advocate, meaning that you are best positioned to ‘take charge’ of your health care.**

When you meet with your Catholic Health primary care provider, here are some questions you should be ready to answer:

- How would you describe your overall health?
- What is your level of physical activity?
- In order, what are your top three health concerns?
- What is your personal health goal, and what are you doing to achieve it?

The doctors in Catholic Health Physician Partners (CHPP) can help you understand why they recommend certain medications, treatments and screening exams, so you can make

informed decisions regarding your health. Certainly, the final decision is always up to you.

Catholic Health provides outstanding, patient-centered care across all aspects of the health care continuum—from emergency departments, radiology sites, primary care or specialist offices. When you engage with Catholic Health, you will be treated like family.

Use Catholic Health’s dedicated phone line to expedite your appointment. Our team will help coordinate your health care needs across our system.

**Call (866) MY-LI-DOC**





**A preventive program  
designed specifically for you**

## Preventive Health

Your primary care provider offers a number of preventive health screenings designed to identify conditions before they become life-threatening. Preventive screening is the process of providing early detection for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, or cancer in people who have little or no symptoms. The discussion may center around depression, fall-risk, family history, breast cancer and colon cancer risk, as well as tobacco and alcohol use to identify the need for additional screening tests.

Your Catholic Health provider can tell you which screening services are right for you based on your age, sex and other common risk factors.

We encourage you to consult with your provider to establish a preventive program designed specifically for you. By scheduling your annual wellness visit with one of our Catholic Health primary care providers, we will address all your health concerns and establish clear health care goals to decrease your risk of developing many diseases.

**To set up your annual exam with a Catholic Health provider, please call (866) MY-LI-DOC.**

## Colorectal Cancer Screening

Colon cancer screening typically begins at age 45—or earlier if a relative was diagnosed with colon cancer. Regular screenings are one of the most important ways for detecting and managing colorectal cancer. Caught early enough, colon cancer can be treated BEFORE it becomes a life-threatening condition.

Some of the signs and symptoms of colon cancer can include chronic diarrhea, blood in stool, chronic constipation, weight loss and abdominal pain. A simple colonoscopy can significantly reduce your chance of succumbing to this disease.

## Breast Cancer Screening

According to the CDC, approximately 1 in 8 women (13%) will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in their lifetime and 1 in 39 women (3%) will die from breast cancer. The good news is that screening for breast cancer can identify tumors early when they are small and highly treatable. The most common physical sign is a painless breast lump, which can sometimes also be felt in the armpit. Monthly self-breast exams can identify early tumors. Any new changes in the breast should be evaluated immediately by your physician.

The American Cancer Society suggests that women begin breast cancer screening at the age of 40 and continue to at least age 69. After 70, it is recommended that women continue mammography screening as long as their overall health is good. To set up a mammogram at a Catholic Health facility, please call the phone number cited on this page.

## Flu Vaccination

Health care providers are often asked if it's important to get the flu vaccine. The current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation is that everyone over six months of age get a flu vaccination, including women who are pregnant. Protecting yourself from the flu is even more important for those individuals with other medical conditions such as cancer, lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, liver disorders and diseases that affect the immune system. According to the CDC, between 30,000–70,000 people die each year from the flu and its complications. Keep in mind that receiving the flu shot not only helps protect you but also those around you. Don't help spread influenza. Although the CDC estimates that the flu shot reduces the risk of influenza infection by about 60%, some adults and children who receive the vaccination will still be infected each season. However, studies suggest that those who are vaccinated are less likely to develop serious flu-related complications.

## Pneumococcal Vaccination

Though most pneumococcal infections are mild, pneumococcal pneumonia can be deadly for older adults. Individuals over the age of 65 and those who have underlying health conditions are at greatest risk. The pneumonia vaccination helps protect you against developing certain types of pneumonia and their associated diseases.

There are two types of pneumonia vaccine (Prevnar-13 and Pneumococcal 23) and depending on your age and medical conditions, your provider may recommend one or both vaccines. If you are over 65—or younger than 65 with any severe medical conditions such as chronic heart disease, lung disease, liver diseases, alcoholism, smoking history, renal disease, cancers, or have had your spleen removed—you should talk to your physician about receiving this important vaccination. Studies have shown a 29% reduction in pneumonia and a 35% reduction in deaths related to pneumonia for those individuals who have received the vaccine.





## Smoking Cessation

Quitting smoking provides immediate benefits, not only improving your breathing but also lengthening your life expectancy. Smokers die earlier than non-smokers; no one can argue that fact. People who stop smoking greatly reduce their risk for disease and early death. Although the health benefits are greater for people who stop at earlier ages, there are benefits of quitting at any age. You lower your risk for lung cancer and also reduce your risk for heart disease, stroke, and peripheral vascular disease (narrowing of the blood vessels outside your heart).

### By quitting today, you will see health benefits immediately:

- **Within 20 minutes**, your heart rate and blood pressure drop.
- **12 hours**, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- **2–12 weeks**, your circulation improves and your lung function increases.
- **1–9 months**, coughing and shortness of breath decrease.

- **1 year**, your risk of coronary heart disease is about half that of a smoker's.
- **5 years**, your stroke risk is reduced to that of a non-smoker 5 to 15 years after quitting.
- **10 years**, your risk of lung cancer falls to about half that of a smoker and your risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, cervix and pancreas decreases.
- **15 years**, the risk of coronary heart disease is that of a non-smoker's.

In general, quitting smoking decreases the excess risk of many diseases related to second-hand smoke in children, such as respiratory diseases (e.g., asthma) and ear infections.

**For help quitting smoking, make an appointment with one of our Catholic Health primary care partners. Call (866) MY-LI-DOC.**

## Hypertension

High blood pressure is often called the silent killer because many people have it and don't know it. Typically, there are no symptoms of high blood pressure, which makes it very important to see your primary care provider to have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis. Elevated blood pressure causes increased force against the walls of the arteries throughout the body. This increased force results in damage to the arteries and causes damage to your organs. Risks for having high blood pressure include age, race, being overweight, smoking, salt intake, excessive alcohol intake, stress and family history. Long standing high blood pressure can increase your risk of heart attack, stroke, aneurysms, vision damage and memory loss.



## Obesity

Being overweight or morbidly obese is a significant health problem. Doctors measure body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference to screen and diagnose obesity. Our Catholic Health website provides you with a tool to calculate your BMI. Visit [chsli.org/primary-care](https://chsli.org/primary-care), then Frequently Asked Questions.

### What does your BMI mean?

A BMI of:	Measure description:
18.5 – 24.9	is normal
25.0 – 29.9	is overweight
30 – 39.9	is obese
> 40.0	is considered morbidly obese

Obesity is a serious medical condition that can cause complications such as metabolic syndrome, high blood pressure, clogging of the arteries, heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, obstructive sleep apnea, chronic venous issues in your legs, arthritis and an increased risk of certain types of cancer. Treatment depends on the cause and severity of your condition and whether you have complications. Treatments include lifestyle changes, such as heart-healthy eating and increased physical activity and Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved weight-loss medicines. One of the most significant ways you can improve your health is to lose weight and become physically active. Catholic Health providers are here to help you obtain your weight goals. Please schedule an appointment with one of our primary care providers to help you be successful.

## Elevated Cholesterol

The most common contributing factor to heart disease, is elevated cholesterol. The higher your bad cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the higher your risk is for heart disease. LDL cholesterol causes the build-up of fatty deposits within your arteries, which in turn reduces blood flow, increasing your risk of stroke and heart attack. If your provider prescribes cholesterol medication it is because studies have confirmed that lowering your LDL cholesterol lowers your risk for a cardiovascular event. Many studies have suggested that lowering your LDL cholesterol to below 70 can slow down or prevent the progression of plaque buildup in your arteries.

**According to the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP), LDL cholesterol goals are:**

- **Less than 70 mg/dL** for those with known heart disease and for other patients at very high risk of heart disease such as those with diabetes.
- **Less than 100 mg/dL** for high risk patients with other risk factors such as hypertension, family history, obesity, smoking and lack of exercise.
- **Less than 130 mg/dL** for those without any risk factors.

In addition to changing your diet and modifying your other risk factors for heart disease, your health care provider may recommend a cholesterol medication to reduce your future risk of heart disease. Lowering your cholesterol now, before you develop evidence of heart disease, goes a long way in keeping you healthy for many years to come.

## Diabetes

Diabetes is a result of your body's inability to manage and control its own blood sugar. Simply stated, either your body does not make enough insulin (Type 1) or your body develops a resistance to the insulin it produces (Type 2). A Type 1 diabetic always requires insulin to live while a Type 2 diabetic may need insulin for better control. Signs and symptoms of diabetes include frequent urination, increased thirst, increased hunger and weight loss. Additional symptoms may include blurry vision, tiredness and poor wound healing. Control of your diabetes is important because of all the associated co-diseases that are common with individuals who have diabetes. Individuals with diabetes are at increased risk for:

**Cardiovascular disease.** Diabetes dramatically increases the risk of coronary artery disease, heart attack, stroke and narrowing of arteries throughout the body. If you have diabetes, you're more likely to have heart disease or stroke.

**Nerve damage (neuropathy).** Diabetes can injure the walls of the tiny blood vessels of the nerves throughout your body, especially in your legs and feet. This can cause tingling, numbness, burning or pain that usually begins at the tips of the toes or fingers and gradually spreads upward. If untreated, this damage can be permanent and eventually affect nerves related to digestion that can cause problems with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation. For men, it may lead to erectile dysfunction.

**Kidney damage (nephropathy).** The kidneys contain millions of tiny blood vessel clusters that filter waste from your blood. Diabetes can damage this delicate filtering system and eventually cause permanent kidney damage. There are tests to indicate if your diabetes is affecting your kidneys, which can be done at the time of your physical. There are medications called ACE inhibitors or ARBs that can dramatically reduce your risk of developing renal damage from diabetes. Discuss with your primary care provider if you should be taking this medication.

**Eye damage (retinopathy).** Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the retina, potentially leading to blindness. Diabetes also increases the risk of other serious vision conditions, such as cataracts and glaucoma. Every diabetic should be seeing an ophthalmologist at least once a year.

**Foot damage.** Nerve damage in the feet or poor blood flow to the feet increases the risk of various foot complications. If left untreated, cuts and blisters can develop serious infections, which often heal poorly.

These infections may ultimately require toe, foot or leg amputation.

Diabetes significantly increases your risk for these medical problems. The A1C test measures what percentage of hemoglobin proteins in your blood are coated with sugar. Higher A1C levels are linked to diabetes complications, so reaching and maintaining your individual A1C goal is really important. When blood sugars are consistently elevated above the normal level, sugars tend to bind to proteins in your body including the protein in red blood cells (hemoglobin), proteins in the blood vessels and proteins in nerves. Over time, this permanently damages the tissue resulting in the long-term complications associated with diabetes such as heart disease, stroke, eye damage resulting in blindness, kidney failure and poor blood flow in the limbs, which may lead to amputations. The percent of blood sugar to red cells, also known as the HbA1c, is one way to determine the overall control of your sugar during the preceding three months. Your risk of having damage to your blood vessels, eyes and kidneys is higher if your HbA1c is high.



HbA1c level	Measure description:
below 5.7%	is normal
5.7% – 6.4%	indicates prediabetes
6.5% or more	indicates diabetes

For each percentage point you drop your HbA1c test result (from 8% to 7%, for example) your risk of kidney, eye and nerve disease drops by a whopping 40%.

Multiple studies have shown that lowering your HbA1c to the recommended range will reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications significantly:

- Eye disease risk is reduced by 76%
- Kidney disease risk is reduced by 50%
- Nerve disease risk is reduced by 60%
- Any cardiovascular disease event risk is reduced by 42%
- Non-fatal heart attack, stroke or risk of death from cardiovascular causes is reduced by 57%

Yet even if you have diabetes, there is no reason why you can't live a long and healthy life. The most important things you can do to minimize your risks are to quit smoking, lower your LDL cholesterol to less than 70, lower your HbA1c to below 7, lower your blood pressure below 120/80 and take the medications your physician prescribes. By taking charge of your own health and achieving the goals listed above, you can significantly lower your risk of all the complications associated with this disease.

## Medication Adherence

The CDC estimates that 30 to 50 percent of chronic disease treatment failures and 125,000 deaths per year in this country are related to patients not taking their medications. Twenty five to 50 percent of patients being treated with cholesterol lowering medications who stop their therapy within one year have up to a 25 percent increased risk for dying than those who continue their medication. In general:

- **20 to 30 percent** of new prescriptions are never filled at the pharmacy
- **50 percent of the time** medication is not taken as prescribed
- **For patients prescribed medications for chronic diseases**, after six months, the majority take less medication than prescribed or stop the medication altogether
- **Only 51 percent** of patients taking medications for high blood pressure continue taking their medication during their long-term treatment

When patients don't take their medication as prescribed, it contributes to disease progression and repeat hospitalizations. Taking your medication as directed, improves your health and can lower the overall cost of care in the United States.

Your doctor has the expertise to treat your medical condition, so maximize the outcome of taking your medications according to the schedule, dosage and frequency prescribed by your doctor. If you have questions about your medication, call your physician to discuss your concerns. Do not take it upon yourself to adjust the dosage or stop the medication.



# Catholic Health

## Physician Partners

245 Old Country Road  
Melville, NY 11747

Catholic Health has primary care providers located throughout Long Island.

**Call (866) MY-LI-DOC to schedule your annual exam.**

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