

Gather Facts

Decisions you make about your health can affect the length and quality of your life. Choose wisely. To do this, you need to gather facts. Use these sources:

- You. You know more about you than anyone else. Be in touch with how you feel, physically and emotionally. Keep track of past and present health concerns.
- Your doctor. Ask for his or her advice. Your doctor may also have written materials on your condition.
- Medical resources. These include:
 - The Internet's world wide web. Look for credible sites, such as www.medlineplus.gov, www.healthfinder.gov, and other Web sites which end in .gov. Other credible sites are ones from hospitals, medical centers, and medical associations. Most often, these sites end in .edu and .org. Web sites. Beware of Web sites that promote health fraud and quackery. Access <http://quackwatch.org> for information. Also, check with your doctor before you follow advice from a Web site. The advice may not be right for your needs.

- Not-for-profit groups. These include the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the American Diabetes Association. To get information, call their toll-free numbers or access their Web sites.
- Government agencies. One is the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Access www.nhlbi.nih.gov.
- Support groups for conditions, such as breast cancer. Check local hospitals for lists of support groups near you. Also, contact the American Self-Help Group Clearinghouse Self-Help Group Sourcebook Online at www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp.



Support groups can be a source of practical information on medical conditions.

Your job is to gather facts. Use the **Key Questions Checklist** and **Medical Decision Comparison Chart** on the next pages to help you know what facts to look for. Once you have the facts, you and your doctor can make the medical decision(s) best suited to your needs.