**Ring in 2023 by Committing to Improve How You Manage Your Chronic Disease**

[Eighty percent of older adults](https://www.ncoa.org/article/the-top-10-most-common-chronic-conditions-in-older-adults) have at least one chronic disease, such as diabetes, arthritis, or high blood pressure, and 68% have at least two. Many struggle to manage them. And let’s face it, chronic conditions can make it hard to do things that bring joy and meaning to each day. Dealing with symptoms like pain, fatigue, stress, and limited mobility can make day-to-day activities — grocery shopping, walking the dog, or playing with the grandkids — harder.

The beginning of a new year offers a chance to look ahead to 12 fresh months of potential. It’s a great time to commit to adopting lifestyle choices that support health, especially for those living with and managing chronic health conditions. ACL funds [Chronic Disease Self-Management Education (CDSME) programs](https://acl.gov/programs/health-wellness/chronic-disease-self-management-education-programs) through the aging network in communities across the country. They have been proven to help older adults gain control of their chronic disease symptoms so they can better maintain their independence and quality of life. While these programs focus on older adults, anyone over the age of 18 can participate, including younger adults with disabilities.

The stories below show how two people, Maria and Bruce, welcomed the arrival of a new year by learning new chronic disease management skills through an ACL-funded CDSME program. They used the turning of the calendar as a spur to improve their health and well-being, and you can, too!

# **Diabetes Self-Management Keeps Maria Moving Forward**

Five years ago, when Maria was diagnosed with diabetes, she worried she would have to give up the 30-minute-per-day walking routine she had previously started as a New Year’s resolution. However, after participating in a weekly Diabetes Self-Management Program offered at her local senior center, Maria, now 78, learned that she could still do most of the things that she deeply enjoyed even while managing her condition. She also learned that prioritizing her walking routine could be a part of how she successfully managed her diabetes.

The program taught her strategies for healthy eating and ways of increasing her physical activity and reducing stress. As a result, it’s been nearly a decade since Maria set her original goal to walk every day, and she’s still at it. Most mornings, she laces up her sneakers and sets off on the trail, enjoying the sounds of nature and feeling stress seep away as she follows a path through the canopy of trees in her neighborhood. Maria’s long, meandering walks have even helped her through some new challenges that have emerged for her in recent years.

# **Bruce Learns New Skills for Coping with Depression**

Bruce and his son, John, run a farm that has been in their family for four generations. Bruce, 72, loves working the land, smelling the wheat when it’s harvested, and feeling like what he does is contributing to his community. At the beginning of 2021, John noticed that his dad seemed to become less talkative and increasingly sad, especially in the months since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Bruce used the new year as an opportunity to suggest to his father that he start the new year off by taking part in a workshop at their local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post.

The program, **Healthy IDEAS**, was offered in partnership with an area agency on aging. Bruce participated via phone, which meant he didn’t have to face the long drive to town from the farm. Over six weeks, Bruce learned to recognize the symptoms of depression and developed skills to manage his condition. He learned the value of staying involved in things he enjoys, how to actively engage in self-care, and new communication skills. Since taking part in the program, Bruce feels “lighter” and is back to truly enjoying running the farm with his son.

Maria and Bruce’s experiences are not unusual. Research has shown that when older adults and adults with disabilities learn how to successfully manage chronic conditions, they experience better overall health. They also experience less depression and fewer lifestyle limitations. Both Maria and Bruce found that the arrival of a new year was an ideal time to address ongoing health concerns and make positive lifestyle changes. In so doing, they found that even though managing chronic conditions can feel complex and overwhelming, there are programs and services to support them.

As we move into the new year, I encourage you to keep Maria and Bruce in mind and take inspiration from their stories. If you have been putting off addressing a chronic condition or are just not sure where to start, consider finding and signing up for a CDSME program in your community.

Living with and managing chronic conditions doesn’t have to mean limiting the things that bring joy to life. In fact, by learning some of the strategies from these programs, you can **celebrate the new year and commit to improving your health and happiness in 2023!**

*To learn more about the different types of CDSME programs available in your community, use the* [*Eldercare Locator*](https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx) *or call 800-677-1116 to find ACL-funded aging and disability service providers in your area.*

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# **About ACL’s CDSME Program**

Over the past two decades, ACL has supported CDSME programs across the country. These programs, which are funded through grants from ACL, help people like Maria, Bruce, and thousands of older adults and adults with disabilities in the U.S. to build skills that help them to better manage chronic conditions and sustain independence.

The CDSME programs that ACL funds have been proven to positively impact health and well-being. These programs incorporate information and resources that are important for successfully living with chronic conditions, such as:

* Problem solving
* Goal setting
* Effective communication
* Healthy behaviors (e.g., physical activity, healthy eating, medication management)
* Stress management

ACL is thrilled to continue to support more communities and organizations working to increase the accessibility and availability of CDSME programs. These programs reflect the vast and diverse array of services and supports ACL’s aging and disability networks provide to enhance the health and well-being of older adults and people with disabilities.

Find more information about [ACL’s CDSME programs](https://www.acl.gov/programs/health-wellness/chronic-disease-self-management-education-programs.), including grantee profiles. For resources and technical assistance, visit [ACL’s National CDSME Resource Center](https://www.ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging/national-cdsme-resource-center).