

Tips to Improve Family Support for Heart-Healthy Living

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Clinical care settings provide important opportunities to engage families in heart health promotion, cardiovascular disease prevention, and care management. The American Heart Association recommends engaging families in adult cardiovascular care to improve outcomes (Figure 1).^{1,2}

Family members are often willing and able to participate in preventive health behaviors and care management (Table 1).¹ Tips to start the conversation about family support include:

- Ask patients and family members about their roles in an open-ended, non-stigmatizing way.
- Respect privacy and dignity by obtaining permission to share and discuss information with support system members.
- Use **motivational interviewing** to assist families in generating their own ideas about how to support the patient.

Figure 1. Theoretical Mechanisms of Effect on Chronic Illness Outcomes



Adapted from Emerging models for mobilizing family support for chronic disease management: a structured review

Table 1. Possible Family Roles in Care of Functionally Independent Adults with Chronic Illness

Family Roles	Examples
Assist with tasks	A patient with hypertension is on several medications. Their partner fills their medication box each week to improve medication taking.
Facilitate, remind, motivate, and partner in behavior change	The adult child of a patient with diabetes offers to walk with their parent three mornings per week to increase their physical activity and support better glycemic control.
Partner in problem solving	A patient with hyperlipidemia is having trouble remembering to take their statin medication at night. Their partner helps them strategize ways to improve adherence.
Help patient cope with symptoms and stress	A patient with newly diagnosed diabetes is struggling to adjust to their diagnosis. The patient’s sister-in-law, who has had diabetes for many years, reaches out to the patient by phone to provide support, tips, and encouragement.
Help patient connect to information and community resources	A patient recently had a heart attack and is feeling isolated. Their adult child researches support groups in their community, discusses resources with their parent, and offers to help them attend a support group.
Track clinically related data	A patient’s partner offers to track home blood pressure values and send them via the patient portal for review.
Manage clinical appointments	A patient with coronary artery disease has mild cognitive impairment and has difficulty organizing appointments. Their niece volunteers to assist with scheduling and transportation for health care appointments.
Support communication between patient and health care provider	A patient with diabetes has been having some symptoms of depression, which their partner has noticed. With their permission, their partner comes to their next primary care appointment to help relay these concerns.

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For more information access Cardi-OH’s expanded resource on **family support**.

References

1. Goldfarb MJ, Bechtel C, Capers Q 4th, et al. Engaging families in adult cardiovascular care: A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association. J Am Heart Assoc. 2022;11(10):e025859. doi:10.1161/JAHA.122.025859.
2. Rosland AM, Piette JD. Emerging models for mobilizing family support for chronic disease management: a structured review. Chronic Illn. 2010;6(1):7-21. doi:10.1177/1742395309352254.

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