

# Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Support groups offer education and social connection for those dealing with health concerns

By Daniel Casciato  
For Pittsburgh Senior News

Seniors who are coping with an illness often find it to be a challenging time in their lives. But thanks to support groups, managing a health concern can become a little easier to deal with. Support groups offer emotional support and help educate people on how to lead healthier lifestyles.

Support groups also allow seniors and their loved ones to talk with others facing the same health or behavioral issues. Allegheny County seniors are fortunate to have a multitude of support groups from which to choose.

## Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation's local chapter has a Self-Help Program that assists members in learning the skills they need to build their own self-management program. The program enables them to become an active member of their healthcare team, work better with their healthcare providers, and handle day-to-day challenges of their disease.

The Self-Help Program is a group education program designed to complement the care provided by a person's healthcare team and allow them to share experiences with others. According to the foundation, trained volunteers (many of whom have arthritis or fibromyalgia) lead the courses. The program is designed to:

- identify and teach the latest pain management techniques;
- help develop a person's individualized exercise program;
- help a person learn to manage



fatigue and stress more effectively;

- discuss the purposes and effective use of medications;
- help find solutions to problems caused by a person's arthritis;
- identify ways to deal with anger, fear, frustration and depression;
- discuss the role of nutrition in arthritis management;
- help a person learn new ways to communicate with family and friends;
- teach people how to form a partnership with their healthcare team.

For more information about the Arthritis Foundation, call (412) 566-1645.

## Health Hope Network

The Health Hope Network, formerly known as the Visiting Nurses Foundation, offers a support group called the Stroke Survivor Connection. It is a free program of physical and mental

activities, and counseling to support patients and their families recuperating from stroke. The program is centered on weekly meetings that are hosted by trained facilitators. The meetings offer peer support, information and resources to survivors and their families, and valuable social opportunities. The program presently serves about 200 patients in 29 locations throughout Allegheny County. For more information, call (412) 937-8350.

## Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association support group is a gathering of people who have a loved one who suffers from Alzheimer's disease or some other type of dementia. They provide information to the caregiver and family members regarding Alzheimer's disease and what community resources are available.

The association believes that interaction among caregivers with similar concerns and experiences helps to develop skills in stress management, problem solving

and home care techniques. For a list of support groups, visit [www.alzpa.org/services\\_programs/support\\_groups.asp](http://www.alzpa.org/services_programs/support_groups.asp) or call (412) 261-5040.

## American Cancer Society

The local chapter of the American Cancer Society (ACS) offers support groups, services and events for support, information and ideas about fighting cancer.

One of their more popular programs is "I Can Cope," an educational program for people facing cancer—either personally, or as a friend or family caregiver. The program helps to dispel myths by presenting straightforward facts and answers to cancer-related questions. There are community classes and online classes.

ACS also offers the Cancer Survivors' Network, an online support group. The site provides a private, secure way to find and communicate with cancer survivors. Visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

## American Diabetes Association

The local chapter of the American Diabetes Association offers support groups and classes at 51 locations throughout the region for people living with diabetes. These support groups and classes offer individuals and their families a chance to meet with others who share the same experiences and learn how to manage diabetes. For a list of support groups, visit [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or call 1 (888) DIABETES.

For information about other support groups in the region, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*