

How helpful are self-help programs?

August 21 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—There's no shortage of self-help apps, videos and podcasts on topics from having better mental health to having a better six-pack.

Though the programs they offer bring the convenience of working at your own pace and in your own space, it's important that you evaluate any program on its merits before committing your time and energy. Also, realize that many are not designed to replace help from an expert for a serious problem, though they might complement it.

First, check out the credentials of the expert behind the program. This is key, whether for a diet guru or a mental health therapist. It only takes a few minutes to do an online search of their background, training and experience with the subject matter. Just as you'd check to see if medical specialists treating you were board-certified in their area of expertise, look to see if he or she has affiliations with institutions and associations important in the field.

Next, does the advice have any [scientific research](#) behind it? Is it endorsed by a key association or respected professional? This is especially important for a program that addresses physical and [mental health](#) issues to help you distinguish between a fad and a bona fide technique that could bring lasting results.

Now evaluate what's involved with following the program. Is the material presented in a way that's easy for you to understand and will the work you have to put into it fit within your schedule?

Finally, review your reasons for considering the program. What are your goals for it and are you truly willing to make the time and effort needed to reach them? Your answers will help you avoid just going through the motions.

More information: The National Alliance on Mental Health has more on what you need to know before [using a therapy app](#).

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Citation: How helpful are self-help programs? (2019, August 21) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-self-help.html>

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