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Take Charge of Your Health Care

The Basics

When you play an active role in your health care, you can improve the quality of the care that you and your family get. Start by speaking up and asking questions at the doctor's office.

Health care is a team effort, and you're the most important member of the team! Your team also includes doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and insurance providers.

To take charge of your health care:

- Keep track of important health information.
- Know your family's health history.
- See a doctor regularly for checkups.
- Be prepared for medical appointments.
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist questions.
- Follow up after your appointment

Take Action!

Follow these steps to play an active role in your health care.

Keep track of important health information.

Keeping all your health information in one place will make it easier to manage your health care. Take this information with you to every medical appointment.

To start your own personal health record, write down:

- Your name and birth date

- The name and phone number of a friend or relative to call if there's an emergency

- Telephone numbers and addresses of all the places where you get medical care, including your pharmacy

- Your blood type

- Dates and results of checkups and screening tests

- All the shots (vaccinations) you've had – and the dates that you got them

- Medicines you take, how much you take, and why you take them

- Any health conditions you have, including allergies

- Any important health conditions that run in your family

If you're not sure about some of this information, check with your doctor's office.

Know your family health history.

Your family's health history is an important part of your personal health record. **Use this family health history tool** (https://phgkb.cdc.gov/FHH/html/index.html) to keep track of health conditions that run in your family.

See a doctor regularly for checkups.

Getting regular checkups with your doctor or nurse can help you stay healthy. If you don't have a doctor or nurse, **check out these tips for choosing a doctor you can trust** (https://healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/doctor-visits/regular-check-ups/choosing-a-doctor-quick-tips) .

Regular checkups can help find problems early, when they may be easier to treat.

- **Use the myhealthfinder tool** (/myHealthfinder/) to get personalized health recommendations based on your age and sex.

- **Get information about shots to help you stay healthy** (/HealthTopics/Category/doctor-visits/shotsvaccines/get-important-shots) .

- **Protect your health by getting recommended screenings** (/HealthTopics/Category/doctor-visits/screening-tests/get-screened) .

If you need help finding health care, **use these tools to help you choose a doctor, hospital, or nursing home** (https://www.healthcare.gov/where-can-i-find-provider-information/) .

What about cost?

Under the **Affordable Care Act** (https://www.healthcare.gov/health-care-law-protections/) , insurance plans must cover many preventive services, like screenings and shots. Plans must also cover well-child visits through age 21 and well-woman visits.

Depending on your insurance plan, you may be able to get preventive services at no cost to you. Check with your insurance company for more information.

- **Find out which services are covered under the Affordable Care Act** (https://www.healthcare.gov/what-are-my-preventive-care-benefits) .

- **Find out which services are covered by Medicare** (http://www.medicare.gov/coverage/preventive-and-screening-services.html) .

If you don't have insurance, check out these resources to help you get health care:

- **Visit HealthCare.gov** (https://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/individual/) to find insurance options for your family.

- For low-cost or free services, **find a health center near you** (https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/) and make an appointment.

Write down your questions ahead of time.

Write down any questions you have about your health. Take the list with you to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. **Use this tool to build your list of questions** (http://www.ahrq.gov/apps/qb/) .

Make the most of doctor visits.

Take your list of questions and personal health record with you to the appointment. You may also want to ask a family member or friend to go with you to help take notes.

Be sure to talk about any changes since your last visit, like:

- New medicines you're taking, including over-the-counter medicines

- Herbs, home remedies, and vitamins you're taking

- Recent illnesses or surgeries

- Important changes in your life, like becoming unemployed or a death in the family

- Health concerns or issues

- Health information you've found online or heard from others

Follow up after your appointment.

It can take time and hard work to make the healthy changes you talked about with your doctor or nurse. Remember to:

- Call if you have any questions – or if you experience side effects from a medicine.

- Schedule follow-up appointments for tests or lab work if you need to.

- Contact the doctor to get test results if you need to.

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