



PATIENT EMPOWERMENT TIPS

Be Prepared, Communicate Effectively, and Be a Proactive Member of Your Health Care Team (Self Advocacy)

- 1) Register at your health insurance plan portal(s) (e.g. Medicaid, Medicare, BCBS, United Healthcare, Cigna, CVS, Express Scripts, OptumRx, etc.) and download their app if available to your device. Maintain the information to make sure that your data is accurate and current and download your policies and other relevant documents (e.g. covered health care providers and facilities, drug formulary lists and tiering, list of fees, out-of-pocket costs, co-pays, co-insurance, deductibles, etc.).
- 2) Register at your health care provider(s) portals and download their app if available to your device. Maintain the information to make sure that your data is accurate and current and download relevant information to help you maintain your Personal Medical Record.
- 3) Keep and maintain an ongoing daily record or journal of your condition(s) that includes symptoms, changes in your health or medications, how you are feeling physically and emotionally and any other relevant information—this can be in written form or through an app.
- 4) Prepare and maintain a current Personal Medical Record (electronic & paper copy) that includes:
 - personal and contact information (name, address, DOB, blood type, marital status, emergency contacts, insurance(s), pharmacies, laboratory facility, etc.)
 - prescription and over the counter drugs including supplements (carry at all times)
 - allergies and reactions if known (food, medication, substances)
 - implanted medical devices with serial numbers
 - medical emergency ID tag information (e.g. Medic Alert)
 - medical conditions with diagnosis dates and any treatments
 - surgeries and relevant procedures with dates
 - relevant miscellaneous information (vaccinations, mammogram, ob/gyn, bone density, prostate, ekg, smoking status, any alcohol or recreational drug use)
 - a family medical history
 - health care provider names and contact information including after-hour information for key doctors

- lab results, test results and visit notes
- copies of x-rays, scans, and other important diagnostic films and reports
- important health 'numbers' (blood pressure, weight, cholesterol, blood glucose)
- copies of health care proxy/living will and medical disclosure forms
- copies of relevant medical records esp. if you have recently moved

5) Prior to medical appointments (in-person or telehealth)

- Prepare a list of any new symptoms and concerns (prioritize them)
- Make a list of the medications that need refills
- Make updates to medical record
- Make copies of test results and procedures done since last appointment
- Confirm appointments
- Pre-register by phone or through electronic portal and complete any required forms if possible to save time

6) During medical appointments (in-person or telehealth) *

- Ask whether you can have someone accompany you to hear what is being said (sometimes the pain and/or medication makes it difficult to comprehend)
- Do not save **major concerns** for the end of your visit (i.e. I've been having this pain in my chest for a few days)
- Share updates to medical record
- Review list of all current drugs including over the counter
- Share list of the medications that need new prescriptions
- Briefly share new symptoms and prioritized concerns (be mindful of the time allotted for appointment)
- Explain how problem impacts your daily life
- Be honest with doctor if you are not following his/her instructions (taking your medication, going to therapy, exercising, eating or sleeping habits, etc.)
- Ask questions (**there are no stupid questions**)
- Bring a pen and paper and take notes
- Confirm that you can call the office and that the physician will return your call if problems arise
- Ask when the doctor usually returns his calls
- Make follow-up appointments

*Usually at in-person medical appointments a nurse will take your vitals—blood pressure, weight, temperature, blood oxygen, pain level, and review drugs, allergies, refills, and any concerns before the doctor examines you.

7) Questions to ask during medical appointments if a test is ordered, a new medication is being prescribed, or a new over the counter treatment is suggested

- Why is the test necessary?
- Will it be covered by my insurance plan?

- When can I expect the test results? (check back if you do not hear from the doctor or staff)
- Why is the new drug or treatment necessary?
- Will the drug or treatment be covered by my insurance plan?
- Is the drug a generic or brand and does it matter?
- What are the drug's common side effects?
- What should I do if they occur?
- What is the best TIME to take the medication and should it be with or without food?
- Does it interact with any of my current drugs or over the counter medications?
- What if I miss a dose?
- How long before I should start seeing results from the drug?
- When should I contact you if the treatment does not help?

8) Prior to telehealth appointment in addition to number 2 above

- Check with your insurer to make sure your telehealth visit is covered
- Check with the health care provider's office and complete any required testing
- Update browser platform to most current version (ios, android)
- Download the electronic application for the appointment; sign in & register
- Save the appointment in your online calendar
- Make sure you are in a private space to limit distractions with minimal background noise
- Make sure there is adequate lighting, use a ring light if necessary
- Check your internet connection/wifi
- Turn on camera & microphone and test
- Provide adequate space if required to move around or stand

9) Just before telehealth appointment

- Take necessary vitals and record them (weight, blood pressure, oxygen level, glucose level, heart rate)
- Check battery level on device to make sure that it is fully charged and keep it plugged in and charging
- Prop up your device if necessary to keep it steady
- Check your internet connection/wifi
- Close other applications to maximize connection speed
- Sign in to the app or click on link in calendar
- Turn on camera & microphone and test
- Have a notepad & pen for notes
- Have a covered glass of water
- Have a prioritized list of questions or concerns

10) During telehealth appointment follow numbers 3 and 4 above