

# Being a Wise Consumer

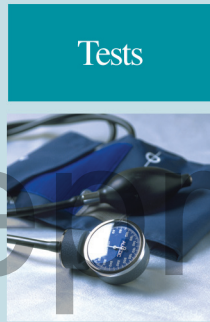
HealthTracker™



Hospitals



Tests



Medications



Providers



## Being a Wise Consumer HealthTracker™

***Note:** This HealthTracker™ is not meant to substitute for expert medical care or treatment. Follow your health care provider's advice.*

This HealthTracker™ is one of many publications and programs offered by the American Institute for Preventive Medicine to help reduce health care costs and improve the quality of life.

### **For more information, call or write**

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Web site: [www.HealthyLife.com](http://www.HealthyLife.com)

### **For Free Health Information:**

Access MedlinePlus®  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

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## Telephone Numbers & Information

### Emergency Telephone Numbers

Emergency Medical Service (EMS): 9-1-1

Ambulance: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire: \_\_\_\_\_

Police: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital Emergency Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis Center: \_\_\_\_\_

Suicide: 800.273.TALK (273.8255)

Poison Control: 800.222.1222

### Doctors/Health Care Providers

Name	Speciality	Telephone #
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Hospital: \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacy: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse Advice Line: \_\_\_\_\_

### Health Insurance Information

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Web site: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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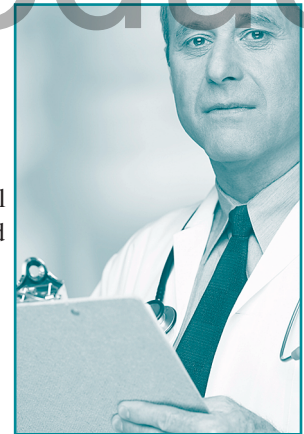
## You & Your Doctor

### Choose a Doctor

Finding the right doctor or health care provider for you is a big part of your medical care. Don't wait until you get sick to find one. Tips to choose or change doctors:

- Look for one who accepts your health plan. Check with the plan. Ask the person at work who handles employee benefits.
- If you belong to a managed care plan, get a list of providers who work with the plan. Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) and Preferred Provider Organizations (PPOs) are types of managed care plans. The doctor(s) you see now may be on the plan's list.
- Ask relatives and friends for doctors they trust and have given them good medical care.
- Check out the doctor's credentials from:
  - The American Board of Medical Specialists  
866.ASK.ABMS (275.2267)  
[www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org)
  - The American Medical Association's "AMA Physician Select" free service  
[www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm)
  - The Federation of State Medical Boards  
888.ASK.FCVS (275.3287)  
[www.fsmb.org/members.htm](http://www.fsmb.org/members.htm)
  - Health Grades  
[www.healthgrades.com](http://www.healthgrades.com)
  - These Web sites:  
[www.docboard.org](http://www.docboard.org) and [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)

- Find out if a doctor is taking new patients. Check with your health plan. Call the doctor's office.
- Look for a doctor you can relate to. How do you want medical decisions to be made? The doctor alone? You and the doctor together? Find one who meets your needs.
- Ask about office hours and staffing. Ask how many patients are scheduled to be seen in an hour and how long they usually wait to see the doctor.
- Ask how payment is handled. Must you pay at the time of the visit? Can you be billed and pay later?
- Find out what other providers serve as backups when the doctor can't take care of your needs. What you should do at non-office hour times? Which walk-in clinic or urgent care center should you use?
- Ask which hospital(s) the doctor sends patients to.
- Look for a doctor who is competent and can care for all your general health needs. Ask if and who the doctor will refer you to for any special health needs.



## See Your “Primary” Doctor Before You See a Specialist

Primary care doctors manage your medical care. If you are a member of a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), you choose a primary care doctor from the HMO plan. This person could be a family doctor, internist, obstetrician/gynecologist, etc. Whether or not you belong to an HMO, call or see your primary care doctor before you see a specialist. If your primary care doctor can't take care of your needs, he or she will refer you to someone who can.

## Talking with Your Doctor/Provider Checklists

Be an active member in your health care. Give the doctor information about you. Do this even if you feel embarrassed. Listen to your doctor, too. Get information in clear terms so you know what to do.



### Before a Doctor/Provider Visit or Call Checklist

Tell and ask your doctor these things:

- ☐ Your signs and symptoms. Give them in the order they occurred. State what makes them better or worse.
- ☐ Results of home testing, such as your temperature.
- ☐ Medicines you take. Fill out a copy of the **Medicine Log** on pages 22 and 23.
- ☐ Allergies to medicines, food, etc.
- ☐ Family and personal medical history facts. (See pages 10–13.)
- ☐ Your eating, drinking, and sleeping habits. How much exercise you get. Your sexual functioning, etc.
- ☐ Concerns you have about your health. What you think caused the problem.
- ☐ What you would like the doctor to do for you.
- ☐ Your pharmacist's phone number and fax number.
- ☐ If you have recently had lab tests, X-rays, etc. from other health care providers. If you can, take the results with you. Or, if time permits, have these sent to your doctor before you see him or her.
- ☐ Write down questions you want to ask the doctor. List the most important ones first. You might want to ask someone to go with you to help you ask questions and remember answers. Find out if you can bring a tape recorder.

### During the Doctor/Provider Visit or Call Checklist

- ☐ Have the information from the checklist on page 7 to refer to or to show your doctor.
- ☐ Ask questions. Write down the answers. If you don't, the doctor may think you understand everything that was said. Examples of questions to ask:
  - What do you think the problem or diagnosis is?
  - What, if any, tests are needed to rule out or confirm this?
  - What do I need to do to treat the problem?
  - Do I need to take medicine? (For more questions on medicines, see pages 17–20.)
  - How can I prevent the problem in the future?
  - Can you write down what you want me to do?
  - Where can I get more information?
  - How are costs handled for this visit and for tests?
- ☐ Let your doctor know if you need more time. If the doctor can't comply, ask if a physician assistant, nurse, etc. can talk to you then or later that day.
- ☐ Find out when you need to see or call your doctor next.

### After the Doctor/Provider Visit or Call Checklist

- ☐ Follow your doctor's advice.
- ☐ Call the doctor's office if you have questions.
- ☐ Tell your doctor if you feel worse, have other problems or side effects from the medicines, etc.
- ☐ Schedule tests and/or appointments as advised by your doctor.
- ☐ If you had tests and did not get the results, call your doctor.
- ☐ Keep return visit appointments.

If you are not satisfied with the service you get, discuss your concerns with the doctor or health care provider. If you are still not satisfied, consider using another provider.



# Family Medical Record

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Family Medical History (Father, mother, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles)			
Condition	Relative	Age of Onset	Age and Cause of Death
Alcohol / Drug Abuse			
Allergies / Asthma			
Alzheimer's / Dementia			
Arthritis			
Bowel Disorder			
Cancer & Type			
Cataracts / Glaucoma			
Depression / Mental Illness			
Diabetes / Kidney Disease			
Hearing Problems			
Heart Disease / Stroke			
High Blood Pressure			
Migraine Headaches			
Osteoporosis			
Pneumonia			
Smoker / Tobacco Use			
Thyroid Problems			
Other			

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## A Routine Checkup

A routine checkup from a doctor or health care provider is a way to find out your health status. It allows you to ask questions, too. It also helps you find out if you have a health problem you don't know about. Some diseases, such as high blood pressure and some cancers, may not have symptoms in the early stages. Tests and exams can help detect these. Follow your doctor's advice for tests and exams. Check with your insurance plan to see if and when tests are covered. Use the insurance company's Web site to find out.

### The Basic Parts of a Checkup

- A complete medical history. This includes family health history, past illnesses, and current problems.
- A check on how well your eyes, ears, heart, bowels, etc. function.
- A check of your blood pressure, pulse, temperature, etc.
- Routine tests. These include blood tests and a chest X-ray.
- A check of specific health concerns.



### Doctor Visit Record

Make a copy for each family member. Name:

Date	Doctor/Provider	Reason	Comments

## Home Medical Tests

Home medical tests let you check for and monitor health conditions at home. Self-testing kits:

- Diagnose when conditions are or are not present. These include kits that test for blood cholesterol level and blood in the stool.
- Monitor a chronic condition. These include kits that test for blood sugar levels and blood pressure.



### Tips for Using Home Medical Tests

- Don't buy or use a test kit after the expiration date. Store the kit as directed on the label.
- Follow instructions exactly. Don't skip a step. Some steps need to be timed. Use a watch or clock with a second hand.
- When you collect a urine sample, use a sterile or clean container.
- Note what you should do if the results are positive, negative, or unclear.
- If something is not clear, call the "800" number on the package or a pharmacist.
- Keep test kits that have chemicals out of the reach of children. Throw away used test materials as directed.

Report any malfunction of a self-test to the manufacturer or to the: U.S. Pharmacopoeia Practitioner's Reporting Network  
800.638.6725 or [www.usp.org](http://www.usp.org)

## Safe Use of Medicines

### Use Prescribed Medicines Wisely

- Things to tell your doctor:
  - Things you have had an allergic reaction to.
  - If you are pregnant or breast-feeding.
  - If another doctor is also treating you.
  - If you have diabetes or kidney or liver disease.
  - If you use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.
- Give your doctor an up-to-date list of all the medicines you take. Fill in the **Medicine Log** on pages 22 and 23. Or, show all your medicines, in their original containers, to your doctor.
- If you have a preferred drug list (formulary) from your health plan, show it to your doctor. Tell your doctor if you get 3 months worth of medicines by mail. He or she needs to write a prescription to cover enough for 3 months.
- When medicine is prescribed, ask your doctor these questions: What is the medicine for? Is there a generic form? (See **Generic Drug Facts** on page 19.) When should I take it? How long do I need to take it? Should I take it with or without food? Can I crush the medicine if I can't swallow it whole? Should I avoid anything while taking this medicine (e.g., grapefruit juice, sunlight)? Write these things down so you don't forget what was said.

- Make sure you can read the prescription. If you can't, the pharmacist might not be able to read it either!
- Ask your doctor for samples of the medicine that you can try for 1 or 2 days. Or, ask the pharmacist if you can pay for 1 or 2 days worth. This lets you check for side effects before paying for 1 or more months worth.
- Find out about your medicines in words you can understand. Ask what side effects the medicine could cause. What you should do if you have any?
- Ask if you can drink alcohol while taking the medicine(s). Alcohol can lessen the effects of some medicines. Other medicines, such as sedatives, can be deadly when used with alcohol.
- Tell your local and mail order pharmacist what medicines and supplements you take. They can check for harmful mixtures with other drugs, etc.
- When you pick up your medicine, ask: "Is this what my doctor prescribed?" If you have any questions, ask the pharmacist. If you get medicines from a mail order pharmacy, call the customer service number for questions and concerns.



- Keep medicines in their original containers or in ones with sections for daily doses.
- Don't take someone else's medicines.
- Throw away medicines that have expired.
- Try to reduce the need for some medications, such as sleeping pills or laxatives. Check with your doctor on ways, other than medicines, to help treat your problem.
- Even if you feel better, don't stop taking a prescribed medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

### Generic Drug Facts

**G**eneric drugs are as safe as brand-name drugs.

**E**ffects in the body are the same as brand-name drugs.

**N**ot advertised like brand-name drugs.

**E**qual results in the body as brand-name drugs.

**R**egulated by FDA like brand-name drugs.

**I**dentical active ingredients as brand-name drugs.

**C**ost less than brand-name drugs.

For more information on generic drugs, contact:  
U.S. Food and Drug  
Administration (FDA)  
Center for Drug  
Evaluation and Research  
888.INFO.FDA  
(463.6332)  
[www.fda.gov/cder](http://www.fda.gov/cder)



## Is It Safe to Buy Medications Online?

- Getting a prescribed drug by filling out a questionnaire, without seeing a doctor, poses serious health risks. So does buying medicines from an illegal Web site.
- Taking a medicine that is unsafe or not right for you puts you at risk for dangerous drug interactions and other serious health problems.

## Tips to Protect Your Health

- Check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy ([www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net) or 847.391.4406) to find out whether a Web site is a licensed pharmacy in good standing.
- Don't buy from sites that offer a prescribed drug for the first time without a physical exam, sell a prescribed drug without a prescription, or sell drugs not approved by the FDA.
- Don't do business with sites that have no access to a registered pharmacist who can answer your questions.
- Avoid sites that do not identify who they are and do not give a U.S. address and phone number to contact if there's a problem.



## Use OTC Medicines Wisely

- Ask your doctor or health care provider what over-the-counter (OTC) products are safe for you to use. Find out what he or she prefers you to take for pain and fever. Don't take OTC medicines on a regular basis unless your doctor tells you to.
- Before you buy or take a medicine, check the expiration date. Discard ones that have expired.
- Read the Drug Facts on the label. Read the active and inactive ingredients. Don't use the medicine if you are allergic to any of them. Heed the warnings the label lists.
- Store medicines in a dry place and out of children's reach. Don't tell children that medicine is candy.
- Don't take any OTC product if you are pregnant or nursing a baby unless your doctor or health care provider says it is okay.
- Before taking herbal products and other supplements, check with your doctor.



For more information, access [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov). Search for "over-the-counter medicine label."

For information from the Office of Dietary Supplements, access [www.ods.nih.gov](http://www.ods.nih.gov).

Medicine Log

Make a copy for each family member. Record in pencil to keep the list current. Name:		
Medicine Name/Dose	Reason for Taking	Doctor Name/Phone

## Storing Medicines

Don't store medicines in a bathroom medicine cabinet. Why? The heat and humidity in bathrooms can shorten the shelf life of medicines. It is better to store medicines on a kitchen or linen closet shelf that is out of childrens' reach. (This includes vitamins, too.) Also, if it's been more than a year since you took inventory of all of your medicines, do it now. Here's how:

- Take everything out of the medicine cabinet.
- Check expiration dates. Throw out all outdated medicines. If you're not sure about a certain item, call your pharmacist. Ask what the shelf life is.
- If medicines are not in original containers and clearly labeled, throw them away. Some medicines come in tinted glass, because exposure to light may cause them to be less effective.
- Discard old tubes of cream that are hardened or cracked. Throw out any liquid medicines that look cloudy or filmy.
- Call the Poison Control Center at 800.222.1222 before using syrup of ipecac. *{Note: The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that parents don't give syrup of ipecac to children.}* Activated charcoal is no longer advised for home use.



## Medical Decisions

Decisions you make about your health can affect the length and quality of your life. Choose wisely. To do this, you need to gather facts. Use these sources:

- You. You know more about you than anyone else. Be in touch with how you feel, physically and mentally. Keep track of past and present health concerns.
- Learn when you need to get immediate medical care or call or see your doctor. Know when you can treat yourself at home, too. It is estimated that 25% of all doctor visits could be treated with self-care. How do you know? Refer to a medical self-care guide. Call your Nurse Advice Line.
- Your doctor. Ask for his or her advice. Your doctor may also have written materials on your condition.
- The National Library of Medicine's Medline Plus® [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov). Use this Web site to find out about:
  - Over 700 conditions, diseases, and wellness topics.
  - Prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.
  - Locations for consumer health libraries.
  - Other resources that give reliable health information.



## Medical Decisions Checklist

(Make a copy for each visit. Ask questions that apply at that visit. Write the answers on the copy.)

### 1. Diagnosis

- ☐ What is my diagnosis? Is it contagious? Is my condition chronic or acute? Is it genetic?
- ☐ How certain are you about this diagnosis?

### 2. Treatment

- ☐ What is the recommended treatment?

*If you are discussing medications:*

- ☐ What is the name of the medicine and what will it do?
- ☐ When, how often, and for how long should I take it?
- ☐ How long before the medicine starts to work?
- ☐ Are there side effects? Should I let you know about any? Will there be interactions with other medicines I take, with foods, etc.?

*If you are discussing a test:*

- ☐ What is the test called? What will it help find out?
- ☐ How accurate and reliable is the test?
- ☐ How should I prepare for it?
- ☐ How and when will I get the results?

*If you are discussing surgery:*

- ☐ What is the surgery called? What happens during surgery? Is local or general anesthesia needed?
- ☐ What will I need to do and avoid after surgery? What is the expected recovery time?

### 3. Benefits vs. Risks

- ☐ What are the benefits? What are the possible risks and complications? Do the benefits outweigh the risks or vice-versa?

### 4. Success

- ☐ What is the success rate for the treatment? Will any personal factors affect my odds either way?
- ☐ How long will the results of my treatment last?

### 5. Timing

- ☐ When is the best time to begin the treatment?
- ☐ When can I expect to see results?

### 6. Alternatives

- ☐ What will happen if I do nothing?
- ☐ What are my other options?

### 7. Cost

- ☐ What is the cost of the treatment?
- ☐ What related costs should I consider, i.e., time off work, child care, travel, etc.?

### 8. Decision

- ☐ You can now make an informed decision. You have the right to choose or refuse treatment.
- ☐ If you feel rushed or uneasy when talking with your doctor, tell him or her how you feel.

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## Healthy Web Surfing

Using the Internet for health information can be frustrating. It can take a lot of time, too. Also, you may not get accurate, unbiased, and up-to-date information.



To make sure a Web site is credible, check for the following:

- The site has been accredited by either HON (Health on the Net) or URAC (which assures a health care organization uses national standards).
- The sponsors of the site have medical or health credentials. The site gives scientific facts from credible medical journals.
- The site is a medical association, hospital, nonprofit organization, college, or government agency.
- The advice given is not just based on personal stories or the result of using a product.
- The site is not just interested in selling a product.
- The site has current information and is regularly updated.
- The site keeps personal information confidential.
- Beware of Web sites that promote health fraud and quackery. For information on this, access [www.quackwatch.com](http://www.quackwatch.com). Also, check with your doctor before you follow advice from a Web site. The advice may not be right for your needs.

## Stop Health Care Fraud

Health care fraud is stealing done on purpose when someone submits false information to get paid for health care benefits.

Health care providers commit health care fraud when they bill for services that were not given or for ones that cost more than the services provided. They may also order tests, etc. that are not medically needed, waive co-pays, etc.

Patients commit health care fraud when they: Submit claims for services, etc. that they didn't get; give false information to the insurance company; or try to add or keep someone on the policy who is no longer covered.

### What You Can Do

- Know what your health insurance plan covers.
- Ask questions about proposed treatment, tests, etc. Are these needed and why? What do they cost? Get a second opinion if surgery is proposed.
- Fill out, sign, and date one claim form at a time. Don't sign blank claim forms.
- Keep a detailed record of your medical care. Compare your medical bills and Explanation of Benefits (EOB) statements to what you actually received. Look for errors. Report errors to your provider and insurance company.
- Protect your health insurance information and ID card. They represent your benefits.



## Prevent Medical Errors

Medical errors are a leading cause of death and injury. It has been reported that as many as 195,000 people a year die in U.S. hospitals due to medical errors.

Medical errors occur when a planned part of medical care doesn't work out or when the wrong plan was used. This can happen in hospitals, nursing homes, etc. and in your home. Examples of medical errors are:

- A wrong medicine is prescribed or taken.
- Too much medicine is taken.
- Mistakes are made before, during, or after surgery.
- The wrong problem is treated.

To help prevent medical errors, be your own watch dog. Take an active role in every decision about your health care. If necessary, have a family member or friend oversee your care.

### General Tips

- Learn about your health problem and its treatments. Talk with your doctor and/or nurse. Use other trusted sources.
- If advised by your doctor, wear a medical alert tag. You can get one at drug stores, medical supply stores, etc. You can use a medical alert service, such as MedicAlert Foundation International. Call 888.633.4298 or access [www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org).

- You have a right to question anyone who is involved with your care.
- Make sure that someone, such as your personal doctor, is in charge of your care. This is very important if you have many health problems or are in a hospital.
- Make sure that all doctors, etc. involved in your care have your health information. Do not assume that they know everything they need to.
- Ask persons to wash their hands before they provide care.
- Ask a family member or friend to be with you at office visits, etc. He or she can help get things done and speak up for you if you can't.



- Know that “more” is not always better. Find out why a test or treatment is needed. Ask how it can help you. You could be better off without it.
- If you have a test, don't assume that no news is good news. Find out the results.
- Follow **Safe Use of Medicines** on pages 17–21.
- If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree and are clear on what will be done. Before you are taken into surgery, mark the body part to be operated on. (Use the marker etc. the doctor gives you to do this.) Follow other measures in **Be Surgery Savvy** on page 42.

## Advance Directives

Advance directives are written documents. They state your wishes to choose or refuse medical treatment when you can't do this yourself. Who needs an advance directive? Adults of any age do. This was made clear by the legal battles between the husband and parents of Terry Schiavo, the 41 year old woman who was the focus of a national right-to-die debate in February and March of 2005.

*Each state has its laws and, sometimes, its own forms for advance directives.* Get forms from your lawyer, local hospital or library, or from your state's Web site or representative's office. A hospital may give you forms for these before you get admitted for surgery, etc. Other places you can get forms and information are:

- Put It in Writing  
[www.putitinwriting.org](http://www.putitinwriting.org)
- U.S. Living Will Registry  
[www.uslivingwillregistry.com](http://www.uslivingwillregistry.com)

*{Note: If you live in or get medical care in more than one state, have advanced directives for all states involved.}*

### Types of Advance Directives

**Living Will.** This written document states what medical treatment you would want or not want if you are unable to state it yourself. A living will applies when you can't express your wishes on your own and you have a terminal illness or other condition from which you are not expected to survive. Find out if your state recognizes a living will. Some states don't.

## Sample Parts of a Living Will

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am of sound mind, and I voluntarily make this declaration.

If I become terminally ill or permanently unconscious as determined by my doctor and at least one other doctor, and if I am unable to take part in decisions regarding my medical care, I intend this declaration to be honored as the expression of my legal right to authorize or refuse medical treatment.

My specific wishes concerning medical treatment:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My family, the medical facility, and any doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel involved in my care shall have no civil or criminal liability for following my wishes as expressed in this declaration.

I may change my mind at any time by communicating in any manner that this declaration does not reflect my wishes.

Photostatic copies of this document, after it is signed and witnessed, shall have the same legal force as the original document.

I sign this document after careful consideration. I understand its meaning and I accept its consequences.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*{Note: This document also has places for witnesses to sign and for notary acknowledgement.}*

***Durable Medical Power of Attorney (Healthcare Proxy).***

This document states your wishes for medical care, too, but names **a person** who would make treatment decisions for you if you are not able to make them yourself. Your condition does not have to be terminal or irreversible to have someone speak on your behalf.

**Sample Parts of a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am of sound mind, and I voluntarily make this designation.

I designate, \_\_\_\_\_,  
(Insert name of patient advocate)  
my \_\_\_\_\_, living at  
(spouse, child, friend, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Address of patient advocate)  
as my patient advocate to make care, custody and medical treatment decisions for me if I become unable to participate in medical treatment decisions.

*{Note: The document has places to list successor patient advocates if the first choice cannot serve.}*

The determination of when I am unable to participate in medical treatment decisions shall be made by my attending physician and another physician or licensed psychologist.

In making decisions for me, my patient advocate shall follow my wishes of which he or she is aware, whether expressed orally, in a living will, or in this designation.

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page*

My patient advocate has authority to consent to or refuse treatment on my behalf, and to arrange medical services for me, including admission to a hospital or nursing care facility, and to pay for such services with my funds. My patient advocate shall have access to any medical records to which I have a right.

I authorize my patient advocate to make decisions to withhold or withdraw treatment which would allow me to die and I acknowledge such decision could or would allow my death.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Sign here if you wish to give your patient advocate this authority.)

My specific wishes concerning health care are the following (if none, write "none"):  
\_\_\_\_\_

I sign this document after careful consideration. I understand its meaning and I accept its consequences.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*{Note: The patient advocate must sign an acceptance to the Designation of Power of Attorney.}*

I understand the above conditions and I accept the designation as patient advocate for: \_\_\_\_\_.  
(name of principal)

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

After you fill out an advance directive:

- Have it witnessed and signed by two persons per the rules of your state.

- Have it notarized per the rules of your state.

- Discuss it with family members, persons close to you, your doctor, etc.



- Keep the original with

personal documents, such as in a home safety box. Give copies to your patient advocates, doctor, etc. List persons you give copies to on the front page.

- You can make changes on the original form, another piece of paper, or on another form. If you do, sign and date the changes. Give copies of these to persons who had copies of the original form.

## The Ins & Outs of Hospitals

It is in your best interest to choose a hospital, outpatient surgery center, etc. that gives quality care. You may not have a choice due to your health plan or doctor, but you can still find out about a hospital or outpatient surgery center before you are a patient there.



Look for a hospital that:

- Is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. Call 630.792.5000 or access [www.jcaho.org/qualitycheck](http://www.jcaho.org/qualitycheck).
- Is rated highly by the state and by consumer groups or other organizations, such as Health Grades ([www.healthgrades.com](http://www.healthgrades.com)).
- Is one where your doctor can treat you and is covered by your health plan.
- Has a lot of experience and success with your condition or the surgery or procedure you need.
- Monitors quality of care and works to improve quality.

### Patient's Bill of Rights

Hospitals and nursing homes are required to inform you about your rights as a patient under their care. The American Hospital Association wrote a voluntary code called The Patient's Bill of Rights. It gives guidelines for staff and patients. Your rights are listed on page 38.

- To obtain from your doctor complete current information about your diagnosis, treatment and prognosis in terms you can understand.
- To receive from your doctor information needed to give informed consent before the start of any procedure and/or treatment.
- To refuse treatment to the extent the law permits. To be informed of the medical effects of your action.
- To privacy for your medical care. This includes all communications and records about your care.
- To expect that a hospital, within its capacity, make a reasonable response to your request for services.
- To get information about any connection between your hospital and other health care and educational institutions as it relates to your care.
- To be advised if the hospital proposes to take part in or perform human experiments that could affect your care or treatment.
- To expect reasonable continuity of care.
- To examine and receive an explanation of your bill no matter how it is paid for.
- To know what hospital rules and regulations apply to your conduct as a patient.
- To obtain a copy of your written medical record.



## Informed Consent

Informed consent means that you agree to treatment only after it has been explained to you and that you understand it. You should know the nature of the treatment, its benefits and risks, and the likelihood of its success. You should also be told if your treatment is an experimental one.

The doctor should review any alternatives to surgery or other procedures. There are no guaranteed outcomes in medicine, but informed consent allows YOU to make a rational and educated decision about your treatment.

## Who's Who at the Hospital

Hospitals have many people who wear lab coats and uniforms. It's easy to get confused as to who does what! Staff members usually wear name tags that identify who they are and what their job is. It is helpful to know who hospital staff members are and what they do.

### Doctors

{**Note:** Medical Doctors (M.D.s) are graduates of medical school. Doctors of Osteopathy (D.O.s) are graduates of osteopathic school.}

- **Interns** – Doctors not licensed to practice medicine outside a hospital until they complete one year of training at a hospital.
- **Residents** – Doctors who are getting training in a specialty medical field, such as internal medicine.
- **Fellows** – Doctors who have completed a residency in a specialty. They are getting additional training in a subspecialty of medicine.

#### ■ *Primary Care*

*Doctors/Specialists* – Licensed doctors who admitted you to the hospital or who are treating you.

- *Medical Students* – Persons in their third or fourth year of medical school. They should be identified as a student, not as a doctor.



#### Nurses

- *Student Nurses* – They are working toward a nursing degree. They assist with patient care.
- *Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)* – Licensed by the state, they provide patient care under the supervision of a registered nurse or a physician.
- *Registered Nurses (RNs)* – Licensed by the state, they assess patients' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs in response to their illness or hospital care. They help coordinate care given by many health care providers.
- *Advanced Practice Nurses (CNs, NPs)* – Clinical Nurse Specialists or Nurse Practitioners. They have advanced education and/or training in a clinical specialty area.

#### Other Hospital Staff

- *Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs)* – Persons trained to give immediate care to patients with emergency medical needs.
- *Registered Dietitians (RDs)* – Persons who meet credentials of the American Dietetic Association's Commission on Dietetic Registration. Clinical dietitians assess patient's nutritional needs and give medical nutrition therapy.
- *Physician Assistants (PAs)* – Persons who are nationally certified and licensed by states to give many medical services that doctors do. These include physical exams and minor surgical procedures. PAs are supervised by doctors.
- *Orderlies* – Persons who assist in patient care. They move patients to X-ray, etc.
- *Occupational Therapists (OTs)* – Persons trained and certified to help patients regain, learn, or maintain daily living and/or work skills. OTs help patients who have disabilities or special physical or mental needs.
- *Physical Therapists (PTs)* – Persons trained and certified to treat patients to relieve their pain and increase their strength and mobility. PTs use exercises, hot and cold treatments, etc.
- *Respiratory Therapists* – Persons trained and certified to evaluate and treat patients with breathing problems.





## Be Surgery Savvy

If your doctor recommends surgery, find out as much as you can about it. Things to ask include:

- What is the name of the surgery?
- What will take place during the surgery?
- What is the goal of the surgery? (Is it a cure or a relief of symptoms?)
- Who will do the surgery? How do I get to see him or her?
- Will I need a local or general anesthetic? How do I get to talk to the person giving this?
- What complications/risks could I have?
- How long after the surgery will it take for me to recover?
- What will happen if the surgery is not done?
- Can the surgery be done on an outpatient basis?
- Where can I go for a second opinion? (Find out if your health plan requires and/or will pay for a second opinion for the proposed surgery.)

*{Note: Check out a surgeon's credentials and experience doing the proposed surgery. See places listed on page 4.}*



## What to Expect Before Surgery

- Expect a visit from the anesthesiologist. He/she will discuss the time of surgery and the anesthetic that will be used. Tell him or her your medical history, allergies you have, surgeries you have had and their outcomes.
- Surgical “preps” are often needed. This depends on the kind of surgery. A “prep” can be not eating or drinking anything for 8 or more hours; having an enema; putting drops in the eyes, etc. Ask the surgeon what you need to do or not do before the surgery. Get written instructions.
- Give your personal items to someone you trust. This includes your watch, wallet, purse, jewelry, and eyeglasses.
- The hospital will have you sign a surgical consent form. Take the time to read it over. Make sure you understand it and agree to it before you sign. See **Informed Consent** on page 39.
- A sleeping pill may be offered the night before surgery. Most people are anxious about surgery and find the medicine helpful.



### Before Going to the Hospital Checklist

- ☐ Find out what your health plan covers. Find out if you need to call your insurance company about anything. Ask who you talk to about billing.
- ☐ If you are having surgery, discuss what will be done with the surgeon and anesthesiologist. See **Be Surgery Savvy** on page 42. Tell them your health history, all the medications you take, and allergies you have. Ask about their fees and what this covers. Find out if the hospital or outpatient center's fees are covered, too.
- ☐ Complete forms as required by the hospital. This will save you time when you check in. It will also let you review what is being asked of you.
- ☐ If you want a private or semi-private room, ask how to arrange this and about the cost. If you need special foods, ask what you need to do to get them.
- ☐ Find out what ID you need to bring with you. Ask what personal items you should and should not take with you. Label all your personal items.
- ☐ Arrange for someone to go with you as needed.
- ☐ Ask your doctor if you can and should take your own medicines and/or vitamins to the hospital.

### When You Are in the Hospital Checklist

- ☐ Make sure that things that identify you have the right information. This includes your hospital wristband ID, name tag in your room, your medical chart, etc. Have all caregivers check your wristband ID before they give you medicine, etc.
- ☐ Ask all health care workers who have direct contact with you if they have washed their hands. If not, request that they do.
- ☐ Read the information booklet, etc. for how things are done and how to get the things you need.
- ☐ When you are given medications, ask what they are. If you don't normally take the medicine, ask what it is, what it is for, who prescribed it, etc. If medicines don't look like ones you take at home, find out why.
- ☐ Tell the doctors, nurses, surgeon, and anesthesiologist any allergies you have. Ask to see if these are written on your chart.
- ☐ Make sure you can access the call button to the nurses' station.
- ☐ Keep a diary of medicine given, services done, etc. See **Diary of Services Given** on page 47.
- ☐ If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done.

*Continued on next page*



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- ☐ Follow pre-surgery instructions. Mark or sign your initials on the limb or area to be operated on.
- ☐ Find out if the hospital has written guidelines to prevent blood clots after surgeries at risk for them. Ask if your surgery is one of them.
- ☐ If you can't watch out for your own safety, have a family member or friend stay with you.
- ☐ Find out what you will need to do when you get home. Do you need any special equipment? Does someone need to stay with you?
- ☐ When you are discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan to use at home. Get written instructions for diet, activity, medicines, reasons to call your doctor, and when you need to be seen again.
- ☐ Ask for written information about the side effects your medicine(s) could cause. Ask which side effects you should contact your doctor for.
- ☐ Request an itemized bill for your hospital or outpatient surgery charges. If you are going to be in a hospital for more than one day, ask for a daily itemized bill.



### Diary of Services Given

**Make copies of this diary for you and other family members.** Keep track of items and other services received. Compare this to the itemized bills received from the hospital, outpatient surgery center, doctor(s), etc.

Date	Medication Given	Item/Supply/Product Given	Name of Test/Procedure	Doctor or Other Professional Visit & Time Spent	Surgery	Blood or Other Test

### Medical ID Card

**Make a copy for each family member.** Keep it in your wallet. Update as needed.

Name	Medical Conditions:
Birth Date:	
Address:	Medicines You Take:
City/State/Zip:	
Emergency Contacts	Emergency Medicines:
Name:	Allergies:
Phone:	
Name:	Blood Type:
Phone:	
Doctor:	Organ Donor: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

## Being a Wise Consumer

### HealthTracker™

The health care system is complex. Being a wise health care consumer is more important than ever. Use this HealthTracker™ to help you:

- Choose good health care
- Learn how to use medicines safely
- Keep track of your past and present health problems
- Make informed medical decisions
- Stay safe in the hospital

*And more...*

