

It's Time: Are You Ready to Transition to Adult Healthcare?



As you get older, you can take more responsibility for your own health. These guidelines give you specific things you can do now to prepare. Then, as an adult, you'll be ready to make responsible decisions regarding your health.

1. Understand your medical conditions. Learn how to explain them to others, both briefly and in detail. Keep a notebook or binder that has all of your important medical information: the name(s) of your medical conditions, an up-to-date list of medicines and dosages, allergies, names and phone numbers of the doctors treating you, discharge instructions from hospital stays, notes from doctor appointments, and the results of labs or medical tests.
 - Know when you need to seek help right away for a healthcare crisis.
 - Ask whom to call or what to do for unusual or new symptoms.
 - Discuss with family and friends what to do in case of an emergency.
 - Talk with close friends about your health conditions, and explain what they can do to help. A support system of friends and family can help as you go out on your own.
2. You are now the legal decision-maker for your healthcare and legally the only one who has a right to your medical information. Ideally, you and your family, along with your healthcare providers, will work together as a team when making decisions about your health. You are now the team leader and they are your advisers. In addition, consider having a healthcare power of attorney — a trusted person, such as a parent or adult sibling, who can make decisions about your healthcare in an emergency. Your healthcare team can explain this to you.
3. Make sure you know the names of all of your medicines, what they do, the dosages and when you take them. Also be aware of any possible side effects of all of your medicines.

- Learn how to read medication labels for both over-the-counter and prescription medications, so you know how to take the medications correctly. Ask your parents or healthcare team if you don't understand something about your medication.
 - Call the pharmacy for prescriptions and supply refills before you run out. Call several days ahead in case the pharmacy has to order your medication or the doctor needs to call in refills. **DO NOT** wait until you are out of medication to call. If you need help, ask your family.
 - Call your doctor's office before you run out of refills for your medications.
 - Work out a system for remembering to take your medicines on your own by using a chart, or an alarm on your watch or cell phone. Ask your parents, caregiver or healthcare providers if you need help creating a plan.
 - Whenever you start a new medication, ask about possible side effects and what you might feel if you are having a side effect.
 - Use your medication like your doctor or healthcare provider taught you to use it; messing with your doses can make you seriously ill. It can be also dangerous to take prescription medicines that aren't yours or to share medicine. Someone else's asthma inhaler, for example, may look like yours, but it may not be right for you.
 - Alcohol, over the counter medicines, supplements, herbs and other drugs can mess with your medicines and your health condition. It's really important to talk to your healthcare team if you use any of these or are thinking about using them. Your team wants to work with you to make sure you have the right information and to help you make healthy choices.
4. In your wallet, carry an emergency card that lists your health problems, medications, allergies, names and phone numbers of your doctor(s) and why you see them, phone numbers for emergency contacts, and the name of your insurance company. Keep it with you all the time. You can also get a medical alert bracelet with this information. If you have a cell phone, program in your doctors' and emergency contacts' numbers.
 5. Learn all your allergies (foods, medication, environmental), how to avoid them, and what to do if you are exposed. Find out if your medicines have side effects when mixed with certain foods or other medicines.
 6. Be responsible for calling and scheduling your appointments. Ask for help when you need it (for example, if you are in school during office hours). One solution is to make your next appointment while you're still at the doctor's office. Ask the receptionist for a reminder card so you can put the new appointment on your calendar.
 7. You are in charge of your health. Write down your questions before your appointment. Speak up and do most of the talking about your health at your healthcare visits. It is important that you lead the discussions, and your provider should be directly asking you and talking to you about your health. You have the right to know what is happening to your body. Keep asking questions until you understand the plan for your care. Your parents or caregivers can be there if you want them to be, but it's good to spend some time alone with your healthcare providers at most visits.
 8. Continue to talk to your healthcare team about your future and how your medical condition will impact it. Important topics are:
 - driving
 - sex
 - alcohol and drug use
 - college or vocational school
 - living away from home
 - medical insurance
 - employment and career choices
 - nutrition and fitness
 - having children in the future
 9. Make sure you know what kind of health insurance you have. Carry the card or a copy (and any necessary co-pay) with you. Make plans to have insurance for yourself as an adult; after you turn 18 or 21, you may not be eligible for your parents' or caregivers' insurance plan.
 10. Know how to use transportation independently to get to and from your appointments. Have a backup plan (for example if your car breaks down).

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11. Use the community resources that have helped you understand and deal with your medical condition, such as support groups and local chapters of organizations that focus on your condition. Ask your healthcare team about what other government and nonprofit resources may be available to you.
 - If you are going to college or trade school, contact their disability services office before you start school. They have tutors, adaptive equipment and supports, which can help you succeed.
12. Begin transitioning from pediatric to adult healthcare providers. Ask your current doctors to recommend adult doctors who understand your conditions; check that the new doctors accept your health insurance. Make an appointment with the new provider(s) for a consultation (a “getting-to-know-you” meeting) before making the full transition.
13. Once you have chosen a new provider, sign the papers to transfer your medical records to the new doctors. Work with your healthcare team to get an up-to-date medical summary and make sure your healthcare binder has your most recent information.

Contact Information

REACH Line

267-426-5569

REACH@email.chop.edu

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