

Actively Involved

THE BEST CARE IS SELF-CARE

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION

Many Americans receive care from doctors in many places. We are a mobile society; we change towns, we change doctors, we change jobs and we change health insurers. But, your doctor's medical charts and other health information don't automatically appear at different doctors' offices or hospitals. Don't assume your doctor has all the relevant information at his or her fingertips. Usually, in fact, the doctor does not.

It's Up To You

Good health care depends on good and thorough information. Your health information—the medicines you're taking, your allergies, your family history, what illnesses or surgeries you have had—is what makes you medically unique and can affect your treatment. It's important that you keep track of your health history and maintain your records, because the one thing you forget to mention could be the detail that might save your life.

There are two important reasons to keep good records about what has happened with your health care. The first is that your record could be the only information source at critical moments, such as an emergency. (Even if you're only able to offer basic information to a new doctor at that time, that information can be very helpful.) The second is that keeping your own record helps you take better care of yourself and helps you ask better questions about your care.

Personal Health Records

Some people compile their health information by creating and maintaining a personal health record (or PHR), which provides a complete summary of your health history. There are many types of PHRs, including electronic versions supplied or sold through a health care provider. With an electronic PHR, you may be able to get to your information anywhere and anytime you have access to the Internet. Some PHR providers may charge a fee for their services.

Talk to your doctor, other health care provider, or someone from your health plan to learn more about the PHR options available to you.

Having a PHR can help you provide more complete information to your health care providers or family members. With all of your health information in one place, you may be able to avoid unnecessary procedures or tests. You may also be able to provide critical information about your health in a medical emergency.

A personal health record may help you save time and money, and improve the quality of care you get.



What Kind Of Information Should You Keep Track Of?

Your personal health record should contain anything that may affect how a doctor might treat you. At a bare minimum, you should list the following information in detail:

- ▶ Any illnesses or conditions in your own history, such as whether you have heart disease;
- ▶ Any potentially relevant family history of illness (such as diabetes, cancer, or high blood pressure);
- ▶ Prescription medicines you're currently taking, including dosage information;
- ▶ Known reactions to medications or allergies;
- ▶ Test results and immunization records;
- ▶ Over-the-counter or herbal medications you're taking;
- ▶ A list of your doctors, other health care providers and your insurance company;
- ▶ Emergency contacts;
- ▶ Advance directives or your living will.

You can add more information to your record as you see fit. Your PHR doesn't have to be fancy, but it should be organized. What's important is that the information you put in your record be as complete, accurate, and accessible as possible. **AI**

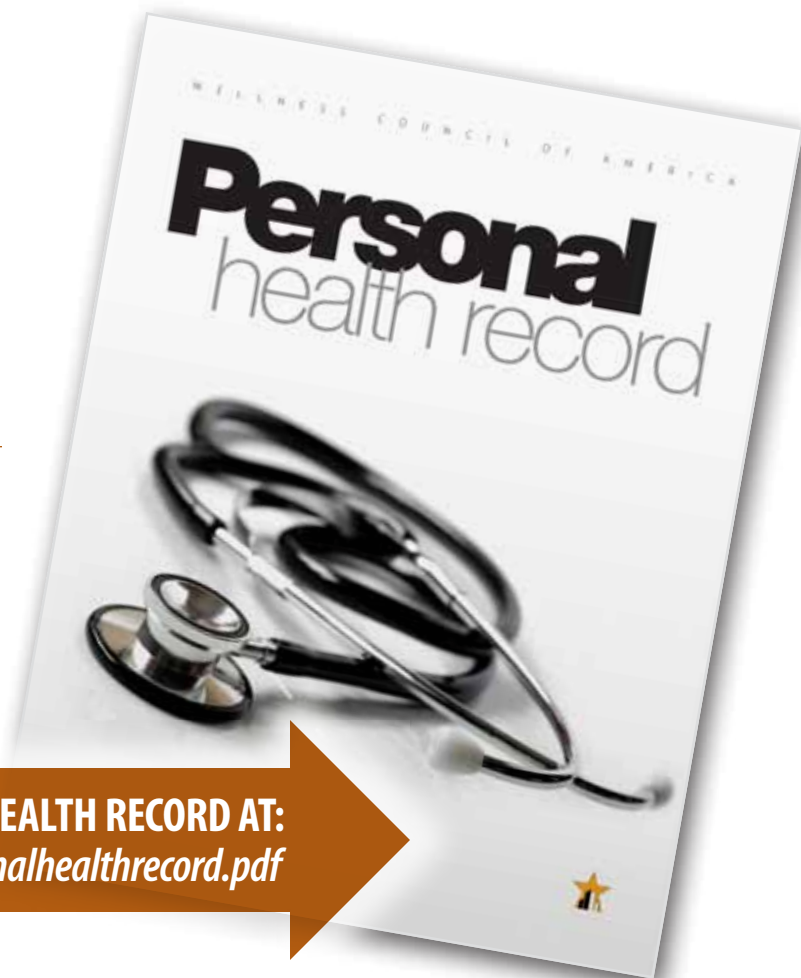


COLLECT YOUR FAMILY HISTORY TO PREVENT DISEASE

Many people collect their family history for a hobby. But did you know that it might help save your life too? Your doctor can use your family's health history to help figure out your risk of developing cancer, heart disease, asthma, diabetes, depression, and many other diseases and conditions. If you don't know your family's health history, now's the time to start collecting it.

Gathering enough family history information to make useful predictions, however, isn't always easy. Health care providers are often pressed for time, and patients don't know the details of what diseases run in their families. The tool, "My Family Health Portrait" can help you gather and record important health information before your medical appointments.

You can download "My Family Health Portrait" from the Department of Health And Human Services web site at www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/portrait/print/index.html.



A personal health record may help you save time and money, and improve the quality of care you get from your health care visits!

DOWNLOAD A PDF OF THIS PERSONAL HEALTH RECORD AT:
www.welcoa.org/freeresources/pdf/personalhealthrecord.pdf

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Being prepared for a trip to the Emergency Room—whether because of an accident or illness—increases your chances of getting safe, high quality health care. It might even save you money, depending on your health plan's policy for Emergency Room visits. Keeping your information either on paper or in an electronic form, like on your cell phone, may help you receive better, safer care in a medical emergency.


There are several ways you can prepare your Emergency information before you ever need it. Keep essential information typed or written in your wallet. Emergency doctors recommend that people with cell phones add "ICE" entries into their cell phone address books. ICE stands for "In Case of Emergency." Medical providers can use it to notify your emergency contacts and to obtain needed medical information if you arrive unconscious or unable to answer questions.

Increasingly, people are creating and maintaining electronic personal health records (PHRs). These can also be very useful if they're portable and/or easy to access.

Here is a basic list of information that you should have available in case you ever need to go to the Emergency Room:

- ▶ Medical conditions or illnesses you have, such as heart disease or diabetes, and any surgeries or treatments you've recently received;
- ▶ Medicines you take, including prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal medications, along with dosage information. Some drug interactions can be deadly, so it is essential for Emergency medical staff to know which medicines you take and in what amounts. If you have time, bring your medicines in a bag, or keep an updated list of all your medicines and dosages in your wallet.
- ▶ Allergies or known reactions you have to medicines, foods, or latex (a material in many medical supplies, including some types of gloves and adhesive tape).



- ▶ Names and contact information of your primary care doctor and any specialists (such as a cardiologist) treating you. Also, have contact information of family members or close friends who may know your medical history in case you are not able to communicate it.
- ▶ Advance directives and your living will. 

SHARE YOUR HEALTH HISTORY

Research has shown that patients who have a good relationship with their doctors tend to be more satisfied with their care—and get better results. Here are some tips for sharing your personal health information with your doctor, to improve your health care partnership:

- ▶ Give information. Don't wait to be asked!
- ▶ You know important things about your symptoms and your health history. Tell your doctor what you think he or she needs to know.
- ▶ It is important to tell your doctor personal information—even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- ▶ Bring a "health history" with you to your doctor's visit (and keep it up to date). You can use a personal health record or other format that helps you stay organized. You might want to make a copy of your health records for each member of your family.
- ▶ Always bring any medicines you are taking, or a list of those medicines and the dosage. Be sure to include when and how often you take them. Talk about any allergies or reactions you have had to your medicines.

The information contained in this medical self-care newsletter can be used to increase your personal awareness of how to manage minor health issues. If you have any questions or concerns about medical issues impacting you or your family, always contact your health care provider.



ABOUT **Madeline Jahn, MOL**

Madeline Jahn is the Communications Associate for the Wellness Council of America. If you have questions about this or other WELCOA publications, please contact Maddy at mjahn@welcoa.org.

Sources:

National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov), Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.aHRQ.gov)



ABOUT **The Wellness Council Of America (WELCOA)**

WELCOA was established as a national not-for-profit organization in the mid 1980s through the efforts of a number of forward-thinking business and health leaders. Today, WELCOA has become one of the most respected resources for workplace wellness in America. With a membership in excess of 4,000 organizations, WELCOA is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of all working Americans. Located in America's heartland, WELCOA makes its national headquarters in one of America's healthiest business communities—Omaha, NE.