
Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records

Keeping copies of your medical records is always a good idea. It is even more important if you have cancer. Cancer treatment can be complicated, and you may see several cancer care providers. And after treatment, you will likely be sent back to a primary care provider.

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Why should I keep copies of my medical records?

Each health care provider will need to know about your cancer and treatment. Giving your health care providers copies of your medical records can help them get correct information.

It's best to get copies of your medical records during or soon after treatment. It can get harder to get your medical records after a few years. Ask your cancer care team for help if you don't know how to get your records.

Sometimes it's hard to get copies of your medical records before you finish treatment. That's okay. The next health care provider you see can request them. You will likely need to give your permission to get your records to protect your privacy.

What types of records should I keep?

If you've been treated for cancer, there are certain pieces of information that you should keep copies of:

- Pathology reports from all of your biopsies and surgeries.
- Imaging test results (CT or MRI scans, etc.),.
- Operative report(s) if you had surgery.
- Discharge summaries you were given when you went home from any hospital stays.
- A list of the anti-cancer medicines you were given including their names and doses, and how long you took them. This might include chemotherapy, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy and hormone therapy.
- A treatment summary if you had radiation therapy.
- Contact information for the providers who treated your cancer.

You might want to work with your health care team to put together a [treatment summary and a survivorship care plan](#)¹ once you have completed treatment. These forms outline the most important parts of your cancer and cancer treatment.

It is also helpful to keep current lists of:

- Other medical problems you have
- Medicines you take including the dose and how often you take them
- Vaccines you've had
- Test results related to your health history, such as A1c for people with diabetes.

You also need to keep records of payments made by your health insurance provider. For tips on how to do this see [Keeping Up With Health Insurance During Cancer Treatment](#)².

How can I get copies of my medical records?

However you choose to keep track of your medical records you have a legal right (called "[right to access](#)"³) to get copies of these records.

Getting copies of your medical records has gotten easier as most health care organizations and providers now use electronic health records (EHR). EHRs let you log into a secure web portal to see and sometimes print your own records.

There are three main types of electronic records:

Electronic health records (EHRs) are controlled by the health care organization or provider. More than one organization may use the same system, but each will have their own access point. If you see providers in more than one organization who use the same system, you may be able to share your information between these organizations. This is not the case if health care organizations use different systems.

Personal health records (PHRs) are used by individuals to manage their own health information. PHR's may be part of a health care provider's EHR. Other people choose to use a separate electronic application to store and manage their personal health records.

Electronic medical records (EMR) are used by medical offices to hold the medical information for their patients. Patients are not usually able to access the information in an EMR.

How should I keep copies of my medical records?

Many people prefer to keep printed copies of their medical records. That way they can share copies with a new health care provider. Other people like to keep their medical records electronically – either as files on their computer, tablet or phone, other electronic devices, or in a personal health record (PHR).

No matter how you store your medical records, be sure that they are kept private and secure. Printed copies of your medical records should be kept in a safe place. PHR's that are part of an EHR are protected by federal laws to make sure they are kept private and secure.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/survivorship-care-plans.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/financial-insurance-matters/managing-health-insurance/managing-health-insurance-when-someone-has-cancer.html
3. www.healthit.gov/topic/protecting-your-privacy-security

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