



Division for Children & Youth with Special Health Needs Tips for Teens Ages 14-17



Take Charge of Your Health: What You Need to Know



As you are getting older, you are probably able to take more responsibility for your own health. These 14 tips may give you some ideas and suggestions to help you prepare. There is a lot of information here and it's ok if you don't use it all. It is not always easy to learn new things, so you may want to practice different situations with your parents or other trusted adult.

There are also tip sheets for parents with suggestions for how they can support you to learn new skills. Over time, with your parents support, and with practice, you will begin to feel better about asking questions and understanding your health.



As you become more comfortable, you may want to ask your parents if you can meet privately with your healthcare team during some or all of your appointments because, in just a few years, you will be responsible for making ALL the decisions about your health.

In addition to the 'Tips', the following website has checklists, resources and suggestions to support you as you move to an adult health care provider, www.mass.gov/dph/youthtransition.



1. You can begin by being sure you know and understand your health condition.

- It is ok to ask your parents, caregivers, nurses and doctors to explain if you don't understand what they are saying.
- Try repeating back to them what you think they said, to be sure you understand.



2. Try practicing how to talk to your friends and others about your health condition in a way that makes you comfortable. Let them know how they can help you; or if there are any warning signs they should know in case you do not feel well.

3. Keep all your medical information in one place. If you have a cell phone, you can have someone help you program your phone with your doctors and other emergency contact numbers. There are many apps for this or you can use a flashdrive for more detailed information. Be sure you include your:

- Health condition
- Up-to-date list of medications and dosages
- Allergies
- Name of your insurance company and ID#
- Discharge instructions from hospital stays



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- Notes from doctor appointments
- Results of lab or medical tests if available

4. **You can learn how to manage your medications.**

- Know what your medicines do; when to take your medicines; and how much (dosage) to take. You can keep a list with your medicines and times you are supposed to take them. You can use an alarm, cell phone or laptop to help you remember the right times to take your medications. If you need help remembering, you can ask your school nurse, parent or caregiver to help you come up with a plan.
- You might want to watch your parent call-in your prescription until you are comfortable doing it on your own.
- Check to see if your pharmacy has an app for this or a phone recording where you just enter your ID#.
- Whenever you start a new medication, ask about possible side effects and how that might affect you.
- Be sure you read the labels on medication bottles for both over-the-counter and prescription medicines, so you understand how to take the medications correctly.
- You probably already know that taking street drugs or drinking alcohol can affect how well your medications work and can make your health condition much worse.
- It is dangerous to take prescription medicines that are not yours or to take the wrong dosage. Someone else's anxiety pills, for example, may look like yours but they may not be right for you.
- If your healthcare team asks you about alcohol or other prescription medications, it's important to answer them honestly.

5. **Know if you have any allergies to any medicines, foods or something you touch, such as latex.**

- Learn how to avoid these items and when you need to speak up.
- If you are allergic to nuts, ask if there are nuts in the food.
- If you have a latex allergy, you will want to know if gloves are latex.
- Know what treatment you need if you are exposed to things where you may have an allergic reaction.

6. **Know when you need medical help right away.**

- What are your warning symptoms?
- Have a plan of action - ask who to call and what to do.
- For example, if you use an EpiPen or insulin/glucagon, make sure the people you spend time with also know how to give these medications.
- Make sure they know when to call 911 and how to reach your emergency contact person.

7. **Learn the names of your doctors and why you see them.**

- You can make the calls to your doctors to discuss any questions you might have about your medical condition(s).
- You can make the calls to your doctors' offices to schedule your appointment(s). This may mean that you will need to learn the phone commands to get to the person who handles scheduling.
- You may need to know your date of birth, address or sometimes your social security number.
- Around age 14, you can see the doctor without your parents in the room, but It's OK if you would like to have them nearby.

8. **You can be in charge of your health.**

- At each doctor's visit, work toward speaking up more so that you eventually do most of the talking.

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- It is helpful to write down your questions before you see the doctor.
 - You, your family, and your doctors and nurses are a team when making decisions about your health.
 - You have the right to know what is happening to your body.
 - Keep asking questions until you understand your care plan.
- 9. You are ready to think about your future and how your medical condition may impact it. Talk to your healthcare team in private if you are more comfortable, about:**
- Driving
 - Sex
 - Alcohol and drug use
 - College or employment
 - Living away from home
 - Medical insurance
 - Having children in the future
- 10. Learn the name of your health insurance company and which family member is the insurance subscriber.**
- Take your insurance card (or a copy) with you every time you go to the doctor or hospital.
 - Keep it in a safe place.
- 11. Think about how to get to your medical appointments.**
- Have a backup plan in case your regular method of getting to appointments fails.
 - Is there someone you trust who can help you learn to use public transportation or give you a ride when you need it?
- 12. Explore community resources that can help you understand how to live successfully with a medical condition.**
- Ask your healthcare team, including nurses, physicians, therapists, social workers or child life specialists, about local chapters of organizations that focus on your condition.
 - Ask where there may be peer groups you can join to work on becoming more independent.
- 13. In Massachusetts, you are a member of your educational team at age 14.**
- As a member of your team, you help plan for your education, training and career. Your school will help you to develop a written transition plan.
 - If you plan to go to college you can contact the school's disability services office before you start. They should have tutors, adaptive equipment, special diets and other supports that can help you succeed.
- 14. At about age 14, your healthcare team should start talking to you about transitioning to an adult healthcare doctor(s). This is a sign that you are growing up, just like getting your driver's license, leaving for college, or living independently.**
- If your team does not bring it up, you and your parents should ask what is the practice's transition policy.
 - For some medical conditions it may take extra time to find a doctor who understands what you need.
 - You can use this time to learn the best ways to care for yourself, so that when the time comes, the transition to adult care will go well.