



Division for  
**Children & Youth with Special Health Needs**  
**Tips for Young Adults Ages 18 & Up**  
**Take Charge of Your Health**



**It's Time: Are you ready to Transition to Adult Healthcare?**



At age 18, you are now responsible for your own health decisions, unless your parents are still your legal guardians. You may have been practicing speaking with your healthcare team, making medical appointments and ordering medications so that you are ready to advocate for your health care needs. This will be important as you begin to transition to the adult health care team.

There are also tip sheets for your parents or caretakers with suggestions for how they can support you to become as independent as possible.



These 13 tips can help guide you to make responsible health choices. There's a lot of information here and it's ok if you don't use it all at once. 'Transition' is a process and does not happen all at once.

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](http://www.mass.gov/dph/youthtransition).



**1. Be sure you understand your medical condition.**

- If possible, you should know your medical history including treatments or operations you may have had when you were much younger.
- It is helpful to know what medical conditions run in your family, who had them and on which side of your family.



**2. Know when you need to seek help right away for a healthcare crisis.**

- Ask whom you should call and 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.
- Learn how to explain your condition to others in a way that makes you comfortable.



**3. At age 18, you are legally the only one who can make decisions about your health, unless you have a court appointed guardian. Your parents will no longer have access to your medical information without your permission.**

- Ideally, you and your family, along with your healthcare providers, will work together as a team when making decisions about your health.

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- You are now the team leader and they are your advisers.
  - It's important that you identify 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 all the options to you.
- 4. Make sure you know the names of all your medicines, what they do, the dosages and when to take them.**
- Be aware of any possible side effects of all of your medicines.
  - Find out if your medicines have side effects when mixed with certain foods or other 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 do not understand something about your medication.
  - Call the pharmacy for prescriptions and 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.
  - 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
  - It is very important that you take your medication the way your doctor or healthcare provider taught you; not taking your medicine as prescribed can make you seriously ill.
  - It can be dangerous to take prescription medicines that are not 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 interfere with your medicines and have a negative impact on your health condition. It is 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.
- 5. ALWAYS keep your emergency information with you. If you have a cell phone, you can have someone help you program in you doctors' and other emergency contacts' numbers or you could put the information on a flashdrive. There are apps for this. Be sure to include your:**
- Health condition(s)
  - Medications, allergies, names and phone numbers of your doctor(s) and why you see them
  - Phone numbers for emergency contacts
  - The name of your insurance company and ID#
- 6. Learn all about your food, medication & any other allergies.**
- Understand how to avoid them.
  - What to do if you are exposed.
- 7. Be responsible for calling and scheduling your appointments.**
- 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.
  - You can see the doctor without your parents in the room, but It's OK if you would like to have them

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nearby.

- Ask for help in scheduling when you need it. One suggestion is to make your next appointment while you are still at the doctor's office and enter it into your cell phone while you are there.
- If you do not have a cell phone, ask the receptionist for a reminder card so you can put the new appointment on your calendar.

#### **8. You are in charge of your health.**

- If it is helpful to you, write down your questions before your appointment.
- Speak up and do most of the talking about your health at your healthcare visits. It's important that you lead the discussions whenever possible.
- You may need to remind your providers they should talk to you directly; sometimes they forget!
- Keep asking questions until you understand the plan for your care.
- Your parents or caregivers can be there if you want them to be; it is your decision. Sometimes it is helpful to have another person there to help you sort out all the information. EVERYBODY needs support sometimes.

#### **9. Continue to talk to your healthcare team about your future and how your medical condition may impact it. Important topics to discuss are:**

- |                           |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Sex                     | • Medical insurance             |
| • Alcohol and drug use    | • Nutrition and fitness         |
| • College or work choices | • Having children in the future |
| • Living away from home   | • Driving                       |

#### **10. Learn about your healthcare coverage.**

- Make sure you know what kind of health insurance you have.
- Carry the card or a copy with you.
- If your insurance requires you to pay a copay; know how you will do that before your appointment, with cash, a credit or debit card.
- After you turn 18 or 26, you may no longer be covered under your parents or caregivers' insurance plan.
- Your parents can help you apply for the right benefits when the time comes. Your healthcare team may be asked to provide medical documentation.

#### **11. Understand what supports may be available to you in your community. Remember, it is always OK to ask for help! Trying to do everything yourself, or not accessing care, because you are afraid or unable to can also be bad for your health.**

- Ask about public transportation. Is there someone who can teach you how to get to and from your appointments? Can they help you come up with a backup plan, for example, if the bus is late?
- Are there community resources that can help you with your medical condition, like peer support groups or young adult organizations?
- If you are planning to go college, find out if they have tutors, adaptive equipment, special diets and other supports to help you succeed.

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#### **12. Begin transitioning from pediatric to adult healthcare providers.**

- Once you know your practice's transition policy, ask your current doctors to recommend adult practice doctors who understand your conditions.
- Depending on your medical condition, it may take some time to find the right adult practice team and that is OK.
- Check that the new doctors accept your health insurance.
- Find out if your current doctor can meet with the new doctor to explain your condition.
- Make an appointment with the new provider(s) for a consultation (a "getting to-know-you" meeting) before making the full transition. Be sure to ask for extra time so you can get all your questions answered.
- It will be helpful, if you can bring a one or two page summary with you that describes who you are, how you like to communicate and any other information you think the new provider should know about you.
- If your medical condition requires you to see more than one specialist, be sure to check with each of them to see if you need to find adult care specialists.

#### **13. Once you have chosen a new adult provider, sign the papers to transfer your medical records to the new doctors.**

- Ask your current healthcare team if they are willing to talk to your new provider if there are any questions.
- Work with your current healthcare team to get an up-to-date medical summary.

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