

My Health Care Notebook



BY LORENE BURKHART, AUTHOR OF

SICK OF DOCTORS? THEN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

A PRESCRIPTION FOR PATIENT EMPOWERMENT

As we move into an era where doctors will have to do more with less, it's our responsibility as patients to manage our health care *better*. Keeping a well organized health care notebook will help your doctors learn the facts about your health and history easily and efficiently. This means you can spend more time talking with doctors about why you are in their office to develop a great partnership.

Ideally, you have kept relevant medical information through the years. Now is the time to pull it together and organize it by categories, such as health conditions, health history (family medical history, types of tests, surgeries, illnesses), health contacts (names of doctors), lists of medications and more.

WHY A HARDCOPY NOTEBOOK VERSUS DIGITAL?

This is the digital age, so why would you want to have your medical information in a hardcopy notebook rather than saved in an online system?

Both paper and digital are good methods for storing information, but I've found a notebook is preferable for taking along on doctor appointments. In a brief poll of medical consumers we recently conducted, people told us while it would be nice to have a web-based system they prefer paper for easy access, portability and to alleviate online security concerns.

Every doctor I've seen where I have used this paper notebook system has been impressed with efforts to maintain my information in a portable and easily available system.

Attempting to go into great detail about your health care history squanders valuable face time. A physician can quickly scan the notebook contents, ask specific questions, and then move on to why you are there. Without the notebook, chances are you'll probably provide information that isn't relevant to the current situation or worse, forget something that is. Also it can serve as a reminder if you believe the physician is overlooking something, you can note it and ask why.

If you decide to use an online system there are several available that appear to be useful, [No More Clipboard](#), [Google Health](#) and [Microsoft Health Vault](#). If you decide to use a paper system, use the outline and supplementary materials offered below. You'll even find tabs for sections already prepared for your use (use Avery dividers 5344) along with a basic health care information form to get you started.

NOW, GET ORGANIZED!

- The easiest way to organize and maintain a health care notebook is to use a standard 8 1/2 by 11-inch three-ring binder with pockets on the inside cover. (The pockets are handy for storing appointment information and doctors' phone numbers.)
- Get a packet of plastic dividers with tabs to go in the binder. I like those to have pockets so information can be easily removed in case a physician wants to make copies. The pockets also make it easier to add new information. Just be sure to keep that information in chronological order, with the most recent items on top.
- Label the divider tabs (Avery 5344) with your health care history first, followed by categories. For example, I've labeled my categories according to types of tests: bone density, lung function, colonoscopy, breast exams, medical interventions (for atrial fibrillations), and surgeries.

- Your health care history should include all of your illnesses and any surgeries you may have had and how old you were when they occurred. It might look something like this:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Illness</u>
3 years	scarlet fever
6 years	chicken pox
7 years	measles
8 years	strep throat
10 years	tonsillectomy
25 years	appendectomy

Include all childhood illnesses because some can cause problems later in life, such as chicken pox, which can cause shingles. If you don't know the age you had an illness, don't worry about that specific as long as you can group it into an age range, such as preschool, elementary, teens, and so on.

Add to your tabs and lists every year (or more often, if needed) to keep them current. These could include:

- Personal profile: insurance carrier, emergency contacts, personal demographic information, date of birth, current medical conditions, preferred hospital system and personal contact information. This makes a nice cover page for health care professionals to quickly scan medical information. Subsequent pages and sections offer details.
- Family history: Ailments including cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's and emphysema, for example.
- Immunizations: Include dates and the vaccination given, especially if you are keeping records for children. The Centers for Disease Control offers schedules for various ages online, if you're a parent and unsure of immunization recommendations [click here](#).
- Stats: Blood glucose and blood pressure levels, height, weight, HDL, LDL and so on. If you don't know this information, ask for it next time you're at the doctor's office.

- Procedures: Make copies of the reports from any procedures — X-rays, lab tests, biopsy reports from surgeries. Consider adding a cover page to each report section to describe how often you have that particular test. These are usually only one page. Place them in the appropriate sections, and keep the originals in a separate file.

Always ask for these reports from the physician or hospital!

You are the owner of all of your records.

- Surgeries and hospitalizations: This should also include emergency room visits, why you were there, the diagnosis and outcome. Next time you find yourself at an emergency room be sure to ask for medical information before you leave to add to your notebook.
- Doctors: List doctors you are currently seeing. Include doctors seen infrequently or in the past if relevant, such as surgeons, cancer doctors, and so on. This section could look something like this:

<u>Doctor's name</u>	<u>Specialty</u>	<u>Check-up frequency</u>	<u>Contact</u>
Dr. Jane Smith	dermatologist	annually	phone

- Current medications: Include why you are taking them, when you began taking them and prescribed dosage. This list should include over-the-counter medications. You can also ask for this information at your pharmacy.
- Past medications: When relevant include why you took them and if the problem was resolved. Again, ask for your history from your pharmacist.
- Allergies: List any and all along with known reactions.
- Lifestyle: Include tobacco, alcohol and drug use as well as health habits, such as diet and workout routine.
- Supplementary materials: Living wills, advanced directives, religious preferences, and other documents relative to medical care.

You should now have several pages that can be quickly scanned by your doctor. If a copy is required for files, it can easily be removed, scanned and put back into the originals. A doctor

also may be alerted to a health problem area that wouldn't be noticed or mentioned during the appointment without this notebook information.

HEALTH CARE NOTEBOOKS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

It's important that each person in your family has his or her own notebook. Your children (when grown), doctors, and emergency admissions staff at hospitals will be grateful. I often say we're patients from the time we're born until the time we die, so why not keep medical records on-hand from birth to death?

When making a notebook for your child, start with birth information and create a divider for each year. Add information each time your child has a check up that is significant (annual or a specific illness). Imagine what a great asset this will be when children become adults and have all of their own medical records at hand. Be sure when it is transferred to them that it includes family health histories, too. When your children are old enough, encourage them to help you keep the medical notebook current. Teaching them to take charge of their own health is a great gift and maintaining a health care notebook together is a wonderful way to do this.

IT'S YOUR BODY. OWN IT!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO
BECOME AN EMPOWERED PATIENT VISIT**

www.MyHealthCareNotebook.com

My Health Care Notebook



My Personal Health Care Profile

Last Update _____

Basic Information

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Date of Birth _____

Race _____

Height _____

Weight _____

Primary Emergency Contact

Name _____

Phone _____

Secondary Emergency Contact

Name _____

Phone _____

Preferred

Hospital System _____

Pharmacy _____

Health Insurance Carrier

Name _____

Group _____

Phone _____

Vision Insurance Carrier

Name _____

Group _____

Phone _____

Dental Insurance Carrier

Name _____

Group _____

Phone _____

In the case of an emergency

Notes

My Health Care History

Family Medical
History

Immunizations

Stats

Procedures

Surgeries &
Hospitalizations

My Doctors

Current Medications

Past Medications

Allergies

Lifestyle

Supplementary

*Use Avery Tabs 5344
when printing*

My Health Care Notebook 