

Empowered Patient®

Your 1-3-6-12 Month Plan



To Be An
Empowered
Patient

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An Empowered Patient® Publication



YOUR 1, 3, 6 & 12 MONTH PLAN TO BE AN EMPOWERED PATIENT®

MONTH ONE

1. Start by filling out a wallet medication card, including over-the-counter and herbal medications. Keep copies in your wallet and in your healthcare binder.
2. Set up an online personal health record or a healthcare binder with dividers for physician visits, test results, and procedures. If needed, set up another binder for medical bills, paid and in process.
3. Check your medications for drug interactions at <http://healthtools.aarp.org/drug-interactions>. Make sure to re-check as new drugs are prescribed to you.
4. If overdue for a physical exam, dental exam or eye exam, schedule an appointment.
5. Obtain and review Advance Directive and Medical Power of Attorney forms. Think about your end-of-life philosophy and who you might ask to be your legal agent in your Medical Power of Attorney document.
6. Complete your "family history" before your next doctor's appointment. Include the ages and existing medical conditions of all close relatives, or their ages at death and causes of death.
7. Think about whom you might want to act as your advocate. Be realistic – do they have a demanding full-time job, access to transportation or their own illness to deal with?
8. If you are hospitalized, try to have someone stay with you at all times. You may need a group of people to take shifts.
9. Realize that federal HIPAA law guarantees patients access to their medical records. (Psychiatric records may be excluded in some circumstances.) HIPAA refers to The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 Privacy Rule.
10. Fill all prescriptions at the same pharmacy to increase the odds that a serious drug interaction will be discovered before it reaches the patient. Be sure that every prescription you are handed is readable.
11. Check your BMI or Body Mass Index at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi. A waist size of more than 35 inches in women or more than 40 in men increases the risk for heart disease and other conditions.
12. Exercise is a vital component of good health. Begin a walking program until you see your doctor and are cleared for more exercise.
13. Eliminate any exposure to second-hand smoke.



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MONTH THREE

1. Visit www.TheConversationProject.org to help you talk to your loved ones about end-of-life care. Look at the Aging with Dignity website at www.agingwithdignity.org and peruse their "Five Wishes" document. This is the type of detailed information that should be addressed in your Advance Directive and discussed with the person who has your Medical Power of Attorney.
2. Arrive at your physician visits prepared. Have all questions listed in single sentences with your most pressing concerns at the top of the list.
3. Ask your physician if your vaccinations are up-to-date. Read up on vaccinations and discuss with your physician what schedule is best for you.
4. Write down your vital signs (specifically your heart rate and blood pressure) to know what is normal for you. Keep track of your vital signs from each doctor's appointment.
5. Ask your doctor if you need any of the following tests (all are blood tests except the EKG):
 - Cholesterol (best if total is under 200, LDL – the "bad" one – under 100, and HDL over 50).
 - Triglycerides (best if less than 150).
 - C-reactive protein and homocysteine (an indication of inflammation in blood vessels).
 - Vitamin D level – low levels may increase your risk of heart disease.
 - Vertical auto profile (VAP) - measures the size of cholesterol particles.
 - Fasting blood sugar - to check for pre-diabetes.
 - Baseline EKG - to check for abnormalities in the heart.
6. Practice asking health care providers to wash their hands. Repeat to yourself, "I know that I am supposed to ask all health care providers to be sure to wash their hands and I am trying to stay safe from infection." Say this over and over until you feel completely comfortable.
7. Realize the importance of washing your own hands regularly, both in and out of the hospital.
8. Don't assume that antibiotics are needed for every illness. Antibiotic resistance from overuse is a now a major public health hazard. Antibiotics are serious medications and should be used with care.
9. Obtain a second opinion for any unconfirmed diagnosis or unresolved medical issues. Consider consulting a specialist outside your plan, especially if your diagnosis is serious. (You may have to pay out of pocket for these consultations). A second – or third – opinion is appropriate at any time during your treatment.
10. Ask that biopsies and scans are read by a second pathologist or radiologist.
11. Report any snoring or symptoms of sleep apnea to your doctor (may increase risk of heart problems).
12. Ask if you have any risk factors for diabetes, stroke, or heart attack and make a plan to reduce these risks.
13. Ask for a referral to a nutritionist to evaluate food choices, eating habits, and to learn to read food labels.



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MONTH SIX

1. Complete your Advance Directive and give copies to the person with your Medical Power of Attorney. Place copies in your health care binder or in your online personal health record.
2. If unsatisfied with your physician start to search for a new primary care physician.
3. Try to see the same physician at each visit. It is generally to your benefit to work with a doctor who knows you and is familiar with your medical history.
4. Keep track of your weight, blood pressure, amount of exercise, medications and any test results in your health binder or personal health record.
5. Evaluate your insurance plan and know the details of your coverage. Is there a lifetime maximum? Is participation in clinical trials covered?
6. See if unreimbursed medical expenses can be paid through a flexible spending account.
7. No news is not necessarily good news. Call to check on your test results if you don't hear from the doctor.
8. If you have been told that you need surgery, research your hospital at www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov to see its scores on many basic safety measures. Look up your surgeon at www.patientsrighttoknow.org.
9. If undergoing surgery, ask if your surgeon is a member of the American College of Surgeons. Check the ACS website at www.facs.org. Is the surgeon *board-certified in the specialty you require* for your surgery?
10. If undergoing surgery, review the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist. Expect your hospital to follow the recommendations on the checklist.
11. If undergoing surgery, know that your surgical site needs to be signed by the doctor who will be performing your surgery. Remind all staff to take a "time out" before the surgery begins.
12. Pain is considered the "fifth vital sign" and all patients have the right to expect pain relief at all times, both in the hospital and at home. Patients can ask to consult a pain management specialist if needed.
13. If possible, add weight training to your exercise routine to improve muscle mass. Be sure to stretch and remain flexible to reduce your chances of injury during exercise.
14. Research any medical conditions you may have been diagnosed with and learn the "standard of care" treatment and management options.
15. Ask your dentist if you have any signs of bone loss or periodontal disease at each visit. There may be a relationship between the bacteria that cause gum disease and the bacteria implicated in inflammatory heart disease. Oral health is an important part of your overall health. Do not overlook the health of your teeth and gums.



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MONTH TWELVE

1. A successful doctor-patient partnership is now established and you know how often you need to be seen for routine check-ups.
2. All screenings are complete – i.e. colonoscopy, mammogram, Pap smear, bone density, etc.
3. Check blood pressure, blood sugar, etc. at home, if needed, and record the numbers in your binder or personal health record.
4. You routinely ask for copies of all test results and reports to place in your medical binder or personal health record.
5. You routinely make a list of questions before each doctor visit and leave with a clear understanding of the actions you need to take.
6. You have an advocate and your “team” selected and ready to spring into action, if needed.
7. When you visit the Emergency Room as a patient or as an advocate, you arrive prepared to answer the following questions: What is the problem or condition that brought you to the ER? What symptoms is the patient having? When and how did the symptoms start? What medical conditions does the patient have? What medications does the patient take and does she have any allergies?
8. You ask regularly, “What else could this be?” Encourage a broad focus.
9. Keep a copy of your child’s immunization record in your purse, wallet, or the glove box of your car. In the event of an emergency or an unanticipated trip to the hospital, you will need this information.
10. If you have an issue with your insurance company about a denial of coverage, contact your state Department of Insurance. Visit http://www.naic.org/state_web_map.htm to find your state office. You can also contact the Patient Advocate Foundation (www.patientadvocate.org) for resources on insurance and medical bills.
11. Know that you can always ask for a more experienced physician in the hospital or the emergency room, even after hours. Ask that an Attending Physician be consulted in person or over the phone.
12. Realize that there are always Hospital Administrators on call 24 hours a day for serious issues that arise during hospitalization.
13. Use the many free educational resources offered by The Empowered Patient Coalition at www.EmpoweredPatientCoalition.org during your inpatient and outpatient health care experiences.

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www.EmpoweredPatientCoalition.org