

# Make your health information personal

*Collecting your health records in one place is a good idea.*

The stories we tell—about youthful mishaps, falling in love, working, playing—shape how others see us. That certainly holds true for our health stories. Unfortunately, this tale is one that few people take the time to put together. That's understandable. Assembling a personal health record involves collecting your information from each of your doctors, pharmacies, labs, and hospitals. These records may be scattered all over town, or even across the country. Then you must decipher the records and stitch them together. Finally, you have to find a good way to store the information. Each of these can be a daunting task.

Why go through this aggravation and effort? "Creating a personal health record makes you the master of your health information, and helps ensure that the information is more complete," says Dr. John Halamka, the chief information officer of Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

## What should it contain?

A personal health record can store everything from basic information about you to copies of x-rays and CT scans. At minimum, it should contain:

- your name, date of birth, and vital statistics like height and weight
- a list of emergency contacts, along with contact information for all your health care providers
- information about your health insurance
- copies of your living will (advance directive) and durable power of attorney for health care, if you have them
- information about allergies or sensitivities to medications
- a brief history of your health, as well as a list of illnesses or conditions your parents, grandparents, and siblings have had

- your current health conditions and how they are being treated
- a dated list of significant illnesses and hospitalizations
- an inventory of the medications you take, including dosage and how often you take them
- lab test results
- a dated list of immunizations.

## Many options

A personal health record doesn't have to be fancy. You can jot down your information in a notebook. If you need some guidance, a book like *A Senior's Health Journal* by Joann Lamb and Ina Abrams can guide you through the steps. The only drawback with printed records is that you need to lug them around with you.



The Internet makes it possible to create a personal health record that you or your doctors can access from anywhere. A variety of products are available, with different bells and whistles.

HealthFrame is a program that guides you through the steps of making a personal health record. The software stores the information on your computer, but you can take it with you by copying it to a portable drive, iPod, or other medium.



MedFlash is a small memory chip that you can clip to a key chain. Its software guides you through assembling a personal health record, which is also stored on the Web.

WebMD, Revolution Health, the American Heart Association, and other online portals let their members create and store their health information online.



Last spring, search giant Google rolled out Google Health. This free online service aims to make it easier

than ever to build and update a personal health record.



Google's partnership with health institutions and companies, including Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, the Cleveland Clinic, CVS, Quest Diagnostics, and a dozen others lets you import your existing medical records, x-rays, prescriptions, and lab results with the click of a mouse.

Microsoft followed suit with a similar service, called HealthVault. It also lets you import readings from blood pressure and blood sugar meters, electronic scales, and other devices. Others, like Dossia, are also gaining ground.



These companies and organizations are making every effort to guard users' privacy and keep their information secure from identity thieves and others who could profit from seeing this sensitive information. Although the security is at least as good as what's applied to the records your doctor keeps, only time will tell how well these online records are locked up.

## It's your record

Corralling your health information in one place, whether that's a notebook or a computer connected to the Internet, can help you in many ways. It can let you and your doctors grasp the full picture of your health, instead of seeing it a chapter at a time. Having everyone on the same page may decrease medical errors, prevent drug interactions, and avoid unnecessary tests. In an emergency, a personal health record can provide vital information that may not be immediately available from your doctor or other health care providers.

You are the rightful owner of your medical information. Creating and using a personal health record can make it work for you. ♥