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Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records

Managing your health care records can be complicated, especially if you're juggling information from several different medical providers and other sources, such as pharmacies. But keeping copies of your records and knowing how to find them is an important way to improve the quality of care you receive, especially if you change doctors.

Why should I keep copies of my medical records?

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new health care provider who doesn't know your medical history. It's important to be able to give your new provider the details of your diagnosis and treatment. One of the best ways to help your provider get accurate information is to give them copies of your medical records.

It can be harder to get medical records that are more than a few years old, so it's best if you can gather these details during your treatment, or soon after. If you aren't sure where to start, ask your cancer care team how to go about getting these reports.

What types of records should I keep?

If you've been treated for cancer, there are certain pieces of information that you should have handy:

- Copies of the pathology reports from all of your biopsies and surgeries.
- Copies of imaging test results (CT or MRI scans, etc.), which can usually be stored digitally on a DVD, etc.
- If you had surgery, a copy of the operative report(s).

- If you stayed in the hospital, copies of the discharge summaries your health care provider wrote when you were sent home.
- If you had chemotherapy or other drug treatments (such as targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or hormone therapy), a list of the drugs, their doses, and how long you took them.
- If you had radiation therapy, a copy of your treatment summary.
- Contact information for the health care providers who treated your cancer.

While your new provider may want copies of this information for his or her records, always keep copies for yourself as well.

You also need to keep records of payments made by your health insurance provider. For tips on how to do this see [1Keeping Up With Health Insurance During Cancer Treatment](#)².

Electronic health records (EHRs) and personal health records (PHRs)

Many health care providers and hospitals now use **electronic health records (EHRs)** to keep track of their patients' medical information. Some EHRs let you log into a secure web portal to see your own records.

If you have this type of access to your records, you might be able to gather information from your records into a printed-out document that summarizes your care. You can then hand it to any provider when you see them for the first time, or even send it to them ahead of time, so they have all the information they need from the first time they see you.

A **personal health record (PHR)** is something you create to organize your health information from different sources, including reports from your health care providers. Electronic PHR programs are becoming more available through health plans, health care providers, employers, and others. These tools offer features for getting, storing, and understanding your health information.

[Blue Button](#)³ is a tool that lets you view and download electronic copies of your own health information from many different sources so you can better understand and track your records. If you choose, you can share it with your health care providers or other people you trust.

However you choose to keep track of your medical information – online or on paper –

you have a federally guaranteed right (called "[right to access](#)"⁴) to get copies of your health records.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/managing-health-insurance/managing-health-insurance-when-someone-has-cancer.html
2. www.healthit.gov/topic/health-it-initiatives/blue-button
3. <http://www.healthit.gov/patients-families/protecting-your-privacy-security>

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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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