

Help your teen take charge of their health



At age 18, your teen is responsible for their own health, which means their doctor can no longer share medical information without your teen's permission. Don't worry. This isn't about keeping you out of the loop – it's about giving your teen the opportunity to develop a relationship with their doctor. Here are some tips on how to help your teen take charge of their health.

Prepare your teen

Teens usually transition from a pediatrician to an adult health care provider between ages 18 and 21. For children with special health needs, you may want to begin the transition earlier than 18.

To prepare your teen, start by:

- Having them make their own appointments.
- Letting them ask and answer questions from the nurse or doctor.
- Teaching them all about the basics of their health coverage — including things like copays, specialist care, and generic drugs.

This gives your teen the opportunity to learn the skills they need to manage their health care.

YOUR TEEN SHOULD ALSO:

- Understand their own health history.
- Be confident enough to ask questions.
- Be able to fill prescriptions and take medications without supervision.
- Make (and keep) appointments.

Talk to your teen's doctor or health care provider about a plan so they can help address your concerns before your child transitions to adult care.

Transition planning for children with special needs

You can start the conversation about the transition from a pediatrician to an adult health care provider as early as your child's preteens. Having a well-thought-out transition plan could mean:

- Reduced medical complications.
- Greater adherence to care plans.
- Increased self-reliance.
- Access to rehabilitation and vocational planning, if needed.

Guardianship

Some teens may not have the ability to understand their medical needs or make decisions about their health. If this is the case, you'll need to take formal steps to be recognized as your child's legal authority.

You can do this by requesting guardianship — a legal way to protect individuals, including children, who cannot make decisions for themselves. A court must determine whether a guardian is necessary and appropriate.

Talk to your lawyer about whether a guardianship petition is right for your situation.

Things to include

When you think about this plan, consider the information you, your teen, and the future health care provider may need to know, like:

- Resources for community services, including rehabilitation, vocational, and educational services.
- Baseline functional, neurologic, and cognitive status.
- Emergency treatment plans and contacts.
- Assessment of the child's understanding of conditions and prognoses.
- Annual readiness assessments.

This type of information helps the new adult health care provider:

- Identify the legal health decision-maker.
- Discuss policies, including HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) regulations and insurance.
- Prevent gaps or duplication of care.

For teens who may not be ready to make decisions about their own health care, you can get legal authorization to stay involved in their care.

- **HIPAA release or authorization** allows the health care provider to release health care information to a designated individual. The teen can limit the types of information that can be shared.
- **Medical power of attorney** lets the teen choose someone to make medical decisions when they are unable to do so.
- **Durable power of attorney** allows your teen to choose you as a designated individual authority to make financial and medical decisions and handle transactions for them.
- **Health care proxy**, like a medical power of attorney, lets your teen choose someone to act on their behalf if they cannot — this person is called an "agent." This document also provides direction to the agent on the types of treatment your teen may or may not want.

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