

Top Five Tips to Mistake-Proofing Your Medical Care

By Dr. Marie Savard

1. Keep track of your own medical records

We no longer live in an era where we have just one primary care provider for our entire lives. The more doctors we see, the more information is lost in the shuffle. Come to your doctor's visit prepared with copies of medical records, recent test results and family history information. Your doctor will have a better picture of your previous medical care and can keep it in mind for future treatment. Also, consider carrying an emergency health information card with you at all times, which lists up-to-date medical conditions, medications, family history, emergency contacts, allergies, immunization status and information on advance directives.

2. Trust your instincts and ask questions

Medicine is a fast-paced field, with advancements and discoveries happening by the minute. It's impossible for doctors to be aware of everything new. If you see something in the news that might apply to your care, write it down and ask about it on your next visit. If you experience any strange symptoms throughout the year, make sure you ask about those as well. Your health radar works better than you give it credit for.

3. Talk with your doctor about which tests are right for you

Age, race, lifestyle, family history and insurance coverage all play a role in determining what tests a doctor will automatically administer. Don't be afraid to ask for the most advanced tests available today, such as the HPV test. When administered with the Pap test, this test conclusively screens for the cervical cancer-causing strains of HPV, and it's now recommended for primary screening in all women aged 30 and over. Unfortunately, not all doctors are aware of this technology, and *some* don't believe in its necessity, thus making it essential for women to get educated about the most up-to-date medical information, screening technologies and treatments available.

4. Monitor and manage your healthcare

For the 364 days of the year between doctors' visits, you must be responsible for your own health. Use this time to set and keep track of target goals. This could include getting more exercise, more closely tracking menstrual cycles or doing a monthly self-breast exam. Additionally, as doctors have less time than ever to talk with their patients about conditions and treatment options, it is essential that you do research and learn all you can about your healthcare needs.

5. Follow-up on test results!

The Jacobi Medical Center incident underscores the fact that no news is not necessarily good news. It's a good idea to give your doctor's office a self-addressed stamped envelop so all results can be mailed directly to you. If you don't receive results within three weeks give your doctor's office a polite call to follow up. It is not good enough to hear your test was normal – ask for a copy of the results. That way you can learn more about your own health and share the results with future doctors. This also guarantees that nothing will fall through the cracks.