As you get older, you are able to take more responsibility for your own health. These guidelines give you specific things you can do now to prepare. Then, when you’re an adult, you’ll be ready to make responsible decisions regarding your health.

1. Learn about your medical conditions and how to talk about them, both briefly and in more detail. Keep a notebook or binder that has all your important medical information: name(s) of your health problems, up-to-date list of medications and dosages, allergies, names and phone numbers of the doctors treating you, discharge instructions from hospital stays, notes from doctor appointments, and lab or medical tests.

2. Learn the names of all of your medications, what these medications do, how often you are to take your medications and all dosages.
   - Whenever you start a new medication, ask about possible side effects and what you might feel if you are having a side effect.
   - Ask your parents or healthcare team if you don’t understand something about your medication.
   - Taking street drugs or drinking alcohol can affect how well your medications work and can make your health problems worse. Be honest when you talk to members of your healthcare team about this. Their priority is to help you stay healthy.
   - Use your medication like your doctor or healthcare provider told you to use it; messing with your doses can make you seriously ill. It can be also dangerous to take prescription medicines that aren’t yours or to share medicine. Someone else’s asthma inhaler, for example, may look like yours, but it may not be right for you.

3. You can be responsible for taking your medications. This means you are able to:
   - Work out a system to remember to take your medications on your own by using a chart, or an alarm on your watch or cell phone. If you need help remembering, ask your nurse, child life specialist, parent or caregiver to help you come up with a plan.
• Read the labels on medication bottles for both over-the-counter and prescription medicines, so you understand how to take the medications correctly.

• Call the pharmacy for refills before you run out of medication. Call several days ahead in case the pharmacy has to order your medication or the doctor needs to call in refills. DO NOT wait until you are out of medication to call.

• Call your doctor’s office before you run out of refills for your medications.

4. Know if you have any allergies (to any medicines, foods or something you touch, such as latex). Learn how to avoid these items and when you need to speak up. For instance, if you are allergic to nuts, ask if there are nuts in the cookies. Or if you have a latex allergy, you’ll want to know if gloves are latex. Know what treatment you need if you are exposed.

5. Know when you need medical help right away. What are your warning symptoms? Have a plan of action. Ask who to call and what to do.
• For example, if you use an EpiPen® or insulin/glucagon, make sure the people you spend time with also know how to give these medications. Make sure they know when to call 911.

6. In your wallet, carry an emergency card that lists your health problems, medications, allergies, names and phone numbers of your doctor(s) and why you see them, phone numbers for emergency contacts, and the name of your insurance company. Keep this card with you all the time. You can also get a medical alert bracelet with this information. If you have a cell phone, program in your doctors’ and emergency contacts’ numbers.

7. Learn the names of your doctors and why you see them. You can make the calls to your doctors’ offices to schedule your appointment(s). It is OK if a parent or caregiver is nearby.

8. You are in charge of your health. At each doctor appointment, work toward speaking up more so that you eventually do most of the talking. It’s helpful to write down your questions before you see the doctor. You, your family, and your doctors and nurses are a team when making decisions about your health. You have the right to know what is happening to your body. Keep asking questions until you understand your care plan.

9. You are ready to think about your future and how your medical condition will impact it. Talk to your healthcare team about:
• driving
• sex
• alcohol and drug use
• college or vocational school
• living away from home
• medical insurance
• employment and career choices
• nutrition
• having children in the future

10. Learn the name of your health insurance company and which family member has the insurance (the “subscriber”). Take your insurance card (or a copy) with you every time you go to the doctor or hospital. Keep it in a safe place.

11. Think about how to get to your medical appointments. Have a backup plan in case your regular method of getting to appointments fails. For instance, if your car breaks down, know how to use public transportation to get there.

continued on next page
12. Explore community resources that can help you understand and deal with your medical condition.
   • Ask your healthcare team (including nurses, physicians, therapists, social workers, child life specialists) about local chapters of organizations that focus on your condition.
13. Talk to a trusted adult, such as your guidance counselor, about your future and options for education, training and careers.
   • If you are going to college or a trade school, contact their disability services office before you start school. They have tutors, adaptive equipment and supports, which can help you succeed.
14. Your healthcare team will start talking to you about transitioning to adult doctor(s) and healthcare providers. This is a sign that you are growing up, just like getting your driver’s license or leaving for college. Use this time to learn the best ways to care for yourself so that the transition to adult care will go well.

---

**Contact Information**

**REACH Line**
267-426-5569
REACH@email.chop.edu

---

**REACH**

**Rapport, Empowerment, Advocacy, through Connections and Health**
is a program for teens and young adults ages 12 – 24 with special healthcare needs and their families, created by teens and young adults with special healthcare needs.