

1. Keep a notebook or folder including important records. You should find out when your last vaccinations were administered: e.g., Tetanus/Diphtheria, pneumonia, shingles, flu vac. If you cannot find this information you're your own previous health records, you can ask at your next appointment if you are due for any. Your main health care provider, your "Primary Care" provider, should be the centralized source for these records.
2. You can obtain any of your health care records by requesting them. You might wish to have the past several years of progress notes from your health care office. This will tell you what your list of conditions include and the treatment plan for them. You also can obtain any x-ray or other diagnostic study report from the agency which provided it. This will be done simply at your request. Some agencies require a 24-48 hour notice for their retrieval.
3. Be aware of your particular cancer screening modalities: e.g., stool samples or colonoscopy, mammograms, prostate cancer screen, or specialty follow-up as needed, such as dermatological, neurological, cardiology.
4. Discuss your long-term health care directives with a chosen friend or relative. Assign a health care power of attorney to one who knows your wishes and can make decisions for you should you become incapacitated for some reason. Fill out an Advanced Health Care Directive and file it with your main provider as well as give copies to those who may be involved in your health care should the need arise.
5. Attend medical appointments with an agenda. List the problems and questions you want addressed. You might ask a trusted friend or relative for their perceptions on items you might want to discuss. When I worked at the VA, I suggested my (male) patients bring their spouse or partner to appointments. Since a wife is usually the "gatekeeper" of health issues for the home, she most likely has her own agenda and items to contribute, plus questions she would like addressed. Other relationship entities may be just as helpful (sons, daughters, helpful neighbor, etc.)
6. Keep a list of all the medications you take. This includes prescriptions and over the counter medications. Some believe that because a substance is listed as "natural" it contains no chemicals. Not true. Go over this list at all health care appointments.