

PRE-SHIFT SKILL: ADVOCACY & INDEPENDENCE

Advocacy & Independence: A Guide for Minnesota Teens

As you grow older, it's important to learn how to take charge of your health care. Here are some tips to help you advocate for yourself and be independent in managing your health:

1. Know How to Ask Questions When You Do Not Understand What Your Doctor Says

It's okay to not understand everything your doctor says. Here's how to get the answers you need:

- **Ask for Clarification:** If something is unclear, don't be afraid to ask your doctor to explain it again. You can say things like, "I don't understand. Can you explain that in a different way?"
- **Take Notes:** If the doctor uses medical words you don't know, write them down and ask what they mean.
- **Ask for Examples:** It can help to ask for simple examples to better understand what the doctor is talking about.

2. Talk to the Doctor Instead of Your Parent/Caregiver Talking for You

As you grow older, it's important to speak directly to your doctor:

- **Be Confident:** At your appointments, the doctor is there to help you, not your caregivers. When you go to an appointment, it's important to talk to the doctor yourself.
- **Share Your Health Concerns:** Tell the doctor how you feel, what symptoms you have, or any questions you might have about your health. You can even write down your questions before your appointment to make sure you don't forget them.

3. See the Doctor on Your Own During the Appointment

When you're old enough, you should see the doctor without your parents or caregivers in the room:

- **Practicing Independence:** It's normal to feel nervous, but seeing the doctor on your own helps you take control of your health.
- **Your Privacy:** During these appointments, it's your right to share whatever you want with the doctor and ask questions about your health.

4. Know That When You Turn 18, You Have Full Privacy in Your Health Care

When you turn 18, you become an adult, and that means you have privacy in your health care:

- **Health Privacy:** Once you're 18, your doctor can't share your health information with anyone, even your parents, unless you give them permission. This is your right under privacy laws called HIPAA.
- **Making Your Own Health Decisions:** As an adult, you get to make your own health care choices. You can decide what treatments you want and which ones you don't, without needing permission from a parent.

5. Know When You Need to Take Your Medicines Without Someone Telling You

As you become more independent, it's important to keep track of your medications:

- **Set a Schedule:** Make a reminder for yourself, like a phone alarm or a note on your calendar, to take your medicine on time.
- **Ask Questions About Your Medicine:** If you don't understand why you need to take a certain medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Be Responsible:** Keeping track of your own medications helps you stay healthy. It's an important part of taking care of yourself.

Additional Resources

For more information on advocacy and independence in your health care, you can visit:

- **Got Transition:** A resource to help teens and young adults transition to managing their own health care. (gottransition.org)
- **The Diabetes Link:** Online community for peer support, resources, and leadership opportunities designed specifically for young adults. (thediabeteslink.org)

Being your own health advocate and managing your health independently are important steps toward adulthood. Take charge of your health with confidence!