

# parents: you are the official care manager!

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Learning to actively manage your child's health and wellness is a topic most parents would prefer not to think about. Yet parents whose children have health or developmental issues have been thrust into the role of being advocate, researcher, observer, educator, coordinator and all-round mountain mover.

As an RN, BSN and parent of three children who have all had various health issues, I can tell you that you can influence your child in achieving his or her potential. Trust your instincts. Learn how to talk so health professionals clearly understand your concerns. And embrace your new role as your child's care manager.

## Keep accurate records.

Maintaining complete and accurate records has far-ranging implications for you and your child.

- Decisions can be made quickly and accurately in an emergency.
- Patterns of illnesses and developmental delays can be quickly identified and acted upon
- Parents are less likely to be told to "wait and see"
- Concerns tend to be taken more seriously
- Parents can have knowledgeable discussions with practitioners
- Parents and practitioners are more likely to set and follow up on goals
- There is less chance for potentially disastrous errors
- Your child will receive better care

Important information includes:

- Contact information and emergency information
- Pregnancy and prenatal health
- Family history
- Newborn health
- Growth and development
- Illnesses and conditions
- Medications
- Operations
- Primary physician visits
- Medical specialist visits

- Other health and wellness professionals (ex. occupational therapist, chiropractor, naturopath, speech therapist)
- Professional's contact information

Having accurate records will make your life much easier. You will be asked for details over and over again, so having a single record will be very helpful.

If your child is older, go through all records that you do have and summarize them. Ask your team of practitioners for copies of their records. From here on, make brief notes whenever a health or wellness event occurs.

## Make the most of appointments.

Here are suggestions that will help you to get the most out of your appointments and to develop mutually respectful relationships with your child's health and wellness team.

- **When you make an appointment, be clear about what you concern is.** If you have more than one issue that you would like addressed, specify this to ensure that the appropriate time is scheduled. If new concerns have arisen since you made the appointment, call ahead to see if the time can be adjusted. Similarly, call ahead or make a separate appointment if you have another child who needs to be seen.
- **Be prepared.** Arrive at the appointment with all of the information you think will be required. Bring a list of current medications that your child is taking, including vitamins and natural remedies. If you are seeing specialists, have all of the related details with you. Write information down if you think you may forget. If you have been using a health journal to record details, take it with you.
- **Prioritize your concerns.** Share your most important concerns at the beginning of your appointment, so that you and your health practitioner can organize your time. It is tempting to leave the concern that is hardest to talk about to the end. Don't. This is usually the most important one.

- **Be brief, very specific and factual in your description of the problem.** Busy health professionals must quickly arrive at conclusions, and you want these conclusions to be based on the facts that are most important. Come to the appointment with details, and offer them without being asked.

Include:

- When you first noticed this problem. Has it stayed the same, or changed?
- What made it better? Worse?
- Had this ever happened before? How was it treated in the past?
- Have your child's sleep/eating/behavior patterns been affected?
- How have you been treating it until now? Has that helped?
- What medications, vitamins and natural remedies is your child receiving?
- Is there anything else happening with your child?
- What do you think the problem is?

If you are concerned about your child's growth and development, review and complete the developmental milestone charts given to you by your health practitioner or found in your health journal. Educate yourself on typical development, so that you can be an educated observer of your child.

- **Do your research.** This will help you to ask relevant questions and to participate in the discussion. The Internet is a great source of information. The library and various health associations can also be very helpful. Just remember that not all information from the Internet, or other sources, is credible. Stick with the websites of the various children's hospitals and treatment centers, teaching hospitals, medical associations, pediatric associations and various health associations. Discuss your findings with your team of health professionals.
- **Ask questions during appointments.** If you are not sure you will remember questions when you get there, write them down. Some questions include:
  - What is the diagnosis? Why do you think that?
  - What are the treatment options?
  - What would you do if this was your child?
  - Is there anything we should know about this treatment?
  - When would you expect to see improvement?
  - What should we do if we don't see improvement?

- Where can we get reliable information about this illness/condition?
- Is there an expert in this condition that you can refer my child to?
- What additional resources are available?

If you don't know how to spell something, ask for it to be written down. If you don't understand, then say so. Request a copy of any reports.

- **Follow exactly the advice and instructions you are given.** Take note of what makes the situation better, what makes it worse and what has no effect. If this situation does not improve in the way that you and your health practitioner expected, you should call or make another appointment to review this.
- **If you feel that your concerns have not been adequately addressed, be sure to state this clearly.** A review of details may be helpful in clarifying your concerns. If you disagree with your practitioner's choice of treatment, state this clearly. Then listen to the response. Should you continue to be dissatisfied, it is reasonable to seek another opinion. Most health professionals will welcome this and can be instrumental in facilitating a referral.

Communicating with health professionals is not difficult and becomes easier over time. This does not require you to be aggressive or confrontational. When you have your facts, offer clear details, participate in the treatment decisions and follow instructions, you are on the road to establishing a mutually respectful relationship with your child's various health and wellness professionals.

The end result is definitely worth the effort and your child will reap the benefits of having the best care manager for the job — you!

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*Karen Melnick RN, BSN, is the author of Your Child's Health & Wellness Record. Order at [www.healthandwellnessrecord.com](http://www.healthandwellnessrecord.com). (Use code Q101 for 15% discount.) Or contact her at [karen@healthandwellnessrecord.com](mailto:karen@healthandwellnessrecord.com). Karen is also available for speaking at parenting and health-related events.*