HEALTH BASICS

Resources

Health resources are people, services, information, and tools that help you understand and manage health care.

WHAT IT IS
People, services, information, and tools supporting health decisions

WHERE IT COMES UP
Care visits, test results, diagnoses, medicines, costs, and crises

WHY IT MATTERS
Helps you understand choices, access care, and act safely

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a disease or diagnosis

WHO TO ASK
A care team, pharmacist, social worker, or patient navigator

HOW IT IS CHECKED
No single test; review source, purpose, access, and safety

Overview

Health resources are the sources of help you can use when making health decisions. They include health professionals, clinics, pharmacies, reliable websites, medical records, support services, and emergency systems.

Different resources meet different needs. A pharmacist can answer questions about medicines. A patient navigator may help arrange appointments or explain care systems. A social worker may help with transport, housing, costs, or support at home. Your medical record can help you track test results, medicines, allergies, and treatment plans.

Resources are not a disease, diagnosis, or treatment. There is no single health resource that is right for every question. The useful choice depends on what you need, how quickly you need it, where you live, and what services you can access.

Some resources are designed for routine questions. Others provide urgent or emergency help. Knowing the difference can help you avoid delays and use the right level of care.

How it works

Health resources generally serve one or more practical purposes.

Clinical resources assess health concerns and provide care. These include primary care practices, dental services, pharmacies, specialist clinics, urgent care centres, hospitals, and rehabilitation services. Their roles are not interchangeable. For example, a pharmacist can review how to take a medicine, but a pharmacy may not be able to assess a serious new symptom.

Information resources explain health topics and choices. They include patient leaflets, public health websites, decision aids, and instructions supplied with medicines or medical devices. Reliable information should state who produced it, when it was reviewed, and what evidence supports it. It should also separate established facts from opinion or advertising.

Personal health records provide information about your own care. Depending on the system, a patient portal or printed record may include visit notes, test results, diagnoses, allergies, immunizations, and medicine lists. Results often need context. A value outside a laboratory's reference range does not always mean that you have a medical condition.

Navigation and support resources help you use the care system. A patient navigator, social worker, interpreter, benefits adviser, or community service may help with appointments, language access, transport, equipment, insurance, or care at home.

Emergency and crisis resources respond when waiting could be dangerous. These systems are separate from routine messaging services, appointment lines, and general health websites. Portal messages may not be read immediately and should not be used for emergencies.

Why it matters for your health

Good resources can help you understand what is happening and take part in decisions about your care. This is especially useful when you receive a new diagnosis, have several medicines, see more than one clinician, or need follow-up after a test.

Clear information can also help you prepare for appointments. Writing down your questions, symptoms, medicines, and priorities makes it easier to discuss what matters to you. Asking for plain-language explanations is reasonable. You can also ask what choices are available, what the expected benefits and harms are, and what may happen if you wait.

Accurate records reduce the chance that important details are missed. A current list of medicines and allergies is useful when you change clinics, visit urgent care, or receive treatment from several services. Include non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal products because these can sometimes interact with prescribed treatments.

Practical support affects health as well. A care plan may be difficult to follow if transport, cost,

work, caregiving, disability access, or language is a barrier. Telling the care team about these limits may allow them to suggest a more realistic option or connect you with support.

What can go wrong

Health misinformation is false, misleading, or unsupported health information. It may appear in social media posts, advertisements, videos, or websites that look professional. Warning signs include claims of a guaranteed result, pressure to buy quickly, hidden authorship, and advice to replace established care without discussing the risks.

Unsafe online medicine sales can expose people to counterfeit, contaminated, incorrectly dosed, or unsuitable products. An online seller should meet the legal pharmacy requirements where you live. Be cautious if a site offers prescription medicines without a valid prescription or does not provide access to a licensed pharmacist.

Fragmented care happens when services do not share important information. This can lead to repeated tests, conflicting instructions, or medicine errors. It is more likely when you use several clinics or when electronic record systems are not connected.

Access barriers include cost, distance, language, disability access, limited appointment availability, and lack of transport or internet service. These barriers are not personal failings. A clinic, social worker, patient navigator, insurer, local health authority, or community service may be able to identify alternatives.

Privacy breaches can occur when health information is shared through unsecured messages, public computers, or unverified apps. Before entering personal information, check who operates the service, why the information is needed, and how it may be stored or shared.

Delayed emergency care can occur when someone uses a routine resource for an immediate threat. Call your local emergency number for signs such as severe trouble breathing, possible stroke, severe bleeding, loss of consciousness, or immediate danger to yourself or another person. Do not wait for a website reply or routine appointment.

A new or worsening concern that cannot safely wait for a standard appointment may need a same-day clinical advice line or urgent care service. Routine questions about records, stable symptoms, referrals, or follow-up plans can usually go through your regular care service.

What you can do

Start by identifying the question you need answered. A medicine question, test result, cost problem, and emergency each require a different resource.

For an appointment, keep a short record of:

Ask who will review a test result, when to expect it, and how you will be contacted. If you can see results in a portal before a clinician reviews them, remember that the number alone may not explain its meaning.

When checking health information, look for the organization responsible for it, the evidence used, the review date, and its purpose. Compare important claims with a government health service, major medical organization, or other independent source. Ask a pharmacist about medicine claims and a suitable clinician about information that may change your care.

You can request access to your health records according to the rules where you live. Check them for basic errors such as an incorrect medicine, allergy, or contact detail. Ask the record-holding service how to request a correction rather than editing clinical information yourself.

If you already have reliable information, an appropriate care contact, and an accurate record, there may be nothing else you need to do.

- Your main questions and when the concern began
- Prescription and non-prescription medicines you use
- Allergies and previous serious medicine reactions
- Recent test results or care from another service
- Practical barriers that may affect the plan

Common questions

Is an online search a health resource?

It can help you find information or services, but search ranking does not prove medical accuracy. Check the original source rather than relying only on a search summary, social media post, or artificial intelligence response.

Who can explain a medicine?

A pharmacist can explain how to use a medicine, common side effects, storage, and possible interactions. Questions about why it was prescribed or whether the treatment plan should change may also need discussion with the prescribing service. Do not stop a prescribed medicine solely because of online information.

What if I do not understand a test result?

Ask what the test measures, whether the result needs action, and when follow-up is due.

Reference ranges are comparison ranges used by laboratories; they do not provide a diagnosis by themselves.

Can I bring someone to an appointment?

Many services allow a support person, although privacy, space, or infection-control rules may affect this. You can ask in advance. A professional interpreter is preferable to relying on a child or family member for complex medical communication.

Where should I look during a mental health crisis?

Use your local crisis service or emergency system. In the United States, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides call, text, and chat support. If there is immediate danger or a serious medical emergency, call the local emergency number.

Sources

- MedlinePlus: Evaluating Health Information , U.S. National Library of Medicine
- Questions Are the Answer , Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
- How to Get Your Health Record , Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
- BeSafeRx: Your Source for Online Pharmacy Information , U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Health Literacy , World Health Organization
- 988 Frequently Asked Questions , U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration