



From Pediatric to Adult Medical Care

Transition Tips for Young Adults with Intellectual Challenges

Leaving the care of pediatric specialists may be difficult. However, adults need adult care providers. The transition should begin as children enter adolescence and be completed when they are in their early 20s. This transition is very important: Healthy adults lead happier, longer and more active lives.

Lay the groundwork: new providers.

1. Discuss healthcare transitions with your pediatrician and pediatric specialists. Ask when they expect you to make the transition to adult providers, and request their recommendations.
2. Network with doctors, friends and support professionals to identify potential adult primary care physicians and key subspecialists.
3. Interview potential new doctors. Ask about their comfort level and willingness to work with adults with intellectual challenges. Make sure to ask what insurances they accept.
4. Discuss expectations for adult healthcare, which should include counseling on nutrition and fitness, sexuality and relationships, drugs, alcohol and smoking, and mental wellness.
5. Identify mental health resources, counselors, religious leaders, family members and friends who could be available if needed.

Cover all the bases: insurance and more.

6. Before turning 18, contact the primary insurance provider to determine ongoing eligibility.
7. If medical assistance (MA) is needed, apply for it now, along with Supplemental Security Income, through the local Social Security office.
8. Request a current medical summary to share with the adult practitioner, including medications, names of specialists, treatments, immunizations, medical equipment, home healthcare services and ongoing therapies.
9. Request that recent (past two to three years) medical records, lab tests and subspecialist reports be transferred from the pediatrician to the new physician.
10. Discuss medical power of attorney and determination of competence with a lawyer to determine who is legally responsible for medical, financial and life-care decisions after age 18. Healthcare team members communicate directly with patients 18 and older. Patients must sign a release form in order for others, like their parents, to have access to reports and discussions with healthcare staff.

Assemble the tools: binders and more.

11. Maintain a medical records binder, including physicians' and therapists' contact information, health history, immunizations, medications and reasons prescribed, insurance information and copies of insurance cards, and an appointment calendar.
12. In the binder, include a "letter of intent" identifying emergency caregivers and guardians, documenting critical healthcare information (hospitalizations, surgeries, medications), and describing your vision of the future. The letter is important in case there is an emergency.
13. Place personal ID, insurance cards (private and medical assistance), physicians' cards, family contact numbers, and medical alert cards in your wallet.
14. Program ICE (In Case of Emergency) phone numbers into your cell phone.

Teach and prepare: medical self-advocacy skills.

15. Have a basic understanding of your intellectual challenges and related healthcare issues.
16. Speak directly with the physician at medical appointments. Ask for a written summary of the care plan.
17. Be involved in making medical appointments, obtaining referrals and making medical decisions.
18. Understand the purpose of prescribed medications and how to refill and pay for a prescription. Understand how to care for hearing aids and glasses.
19. Learn how to use public transportation or paratransit services for medical appointments.
20. Advocate for medical care. Ask your county supports coordinator about a health advocate who can assist as needed.
21. The Internet is a valuable tool for transition information. A good Web site is www.hrtw.org and there are many others.