

These simple steps can help seniors manage their health care

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(HealthDay)—Navigating the health care system can be challenging, but

an expert urges older people not to try to go it alone.

"It's common for someone who hasn't had any [health problems](#) suddenly to be faced with their own issues and the need to navigate the [health care system](#)," said Maria Radwanski, manager of care transitions and outpatient adult care management at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.

"Before that happens, talk with friends who've been dealing with health concerns—especially if they've been in the hospital—to hear about their experiences so you have a better idea of what it might be like," Radwanski said in a Penn State Health news release.

Another tip: Ask a trusted friend or loved one to accompany you to medical appointments.

"It's so important for a patient to understand what the doctor says," Radwanski said. "Often, a patient won't fully digest what the doctor's saying. I advise seniors to have someone else at the appointment with a pen and paper to write everything down and make sure there's appropriate follow-up."

When they see a doctor, [older patients](#) should bring an updated list of [health concerns](#)—including any changes in their [medical history](#) or new symptoms—as well as a list of all current prescription and over-the-counter medications they take, including any supplements, along with their dosages.

Some people may find it easier to bring all their medications to their appointment, Radwanski said.

If you don't understand your [health insurance coverage](#) or medical bills, ask a trusted loved one or a professional to go over them with you.

"There are groups out there and advocacy services through senior centers that are a good resource to helping understand health care financials," Radwanski said. "They offer continuing education-type programs for the public all the time to help people understand what insurance will and won't cover."

Older patients and their advocates can also work with care managers or financial aid staff at a medical center to help sort through their bills.

Some seniors may be uncomfortable asking for help or may not even realize they need it. So it's important for [adult children](#) and other trusted individuals to ask, but to do so carefully.

"You'll want to get permission to have these conversations with your mom or dad, aunt or uncle now, ahead of a medical crisis," Radwanski said. "Come in with love and respect, ideally in a face-to-face conversation. Let them know how much they're cared for, that you want the best for them and that you have some concerns you'd like to discuss with them. Then ask their permission to do that."

More information: Health In Aging Foundation offers wellness and prevention [resources for older adults](#).

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