

## What's the Difference between Electronic Health Records and Personal Health Records?

Information in an electronic health record is typically entered by and accessed by your health care providers. A personal health record is designed to be set up and accessed by patients themselves.

## What Advantages Do Electronic Health Records and Personal Health Records Offer?

They can help you:

- Become more actively engaged in your own care
- Take care of your family members more easily

Having a system in place to help you track and access health information for you and your family can help you prevent and manage illness.

## For More Information About:

- The transition to electronic health records and how health information technology can improve health care, visit <http://healthit.gov>.
- The privacy and security of your health information and your rights under the HIPAA Privacy Rule, visit <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy>.

Electronic health records can help improve the quality and convenience of health care while reducing costs.



The Office of the National Coordinator for  
Health Information Technology

Electronic Health Records  
Advancing America's Health Care

# Why Electronic Health Records?

Electronic health records or “EHRs” make it possible for your health care providers to better manage your care through secure use and sharing of health information.

Electronic health records are similar to electronic medical records, which are a digital version of the paper charts in a health care provider’s office. However, electronic health records are built to share information with other health care providers, such as laboratories and specialists, so they contain information from *all the clinicians involved in your care*.

With electronic health records, your complete health care information can be accessed by your health care providers in a secure and timely manner.

## How Will Electronic Health Records Improve Care?

With the help of electronic health records, your health care providers can have:

- More accurate and complete information about your health—including your medical history, medications, and test results—to help ensure they can give you the best possible care.
- Improved ability to share information with other providers you see to better coordinate the care they give to you and your family.
- A way to securely share information with you electronically, allowing you to fully take part in decisions about your health and the health of your family.

## What Is a Personal Health Record?

Like an electronic health record, a personal health record or “PHR” includes information about your health, such as:

- Contact information for family members and health care providers
- Diagnoses
- Medications
- Immunization dates
- Allergies
- Lab and test results
- Family medical history

While some people keep this information in a folder or in a file cabinet, having it in electronic form means it can be shared easily with other people who need it.

## Your Health Information Is Protected

Privacy and security safeguards are in place to protect your paper and electronic health information.

- The same privacy protections that apply to your paper records also apply to your electronic health records. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule, a federal law, requires your health care providers and health plans to give you a Notice of Privacy Practices to inform you how your information may be used and shared, as well as how you can exercise your rights under the HIPAA Privacy Rule. These rights include the right to see or get a copy of your health records.
- With electronic health records, the HIPAA Security Rule, a federal law, sets national standards to ensure that your health information in electronic form is secure. These standards include access controls, like tracking who accesses your health information and password protections.
- EHRs have an “audit trail” feature, which generally records who accessed your information, what changes were made, and when.