

Managing Medical Bills

A solid financial plan includes preparation for your physical health and well-being. While it is true that medical procedures and the bills that accompany them can be confusing and overwhelming, you need not be a doctor to understand your rights and responsibilities. Review the tips below to avoid some common consumer mistakes, then use the tool on the back to address your specific needs.

1. Seek to understand your medical care and related bills.

- ✓ Medical coding is a complex language often misunderstood by consumers. If a procedure is coded incorrectly, your insurance company may not pay.
- ✓ An Explanation of Benefits (EOB) from your insurance company will outline what charges have been billed and paid.
- ✓ Ask for an itemized bill for the services received and compare it to the EOB. Request that any errors or omissions are taken care of immediately.
- ✓ Question anything that seems redundant or misleading on either a bill or EOB.
- ✓ Be prepared - it may take several follow-up calls to your insurance or the provider to resolve any issues.
- ✓ If you're not getting questions answered to your satisfaction, do not hesitate to ask to speak with an administrator or patient liaison.

2. Avoid using credit cards to pay for medical charges.

- ✓ It is imperative that you understand what you were billed for prior to making payments.
- ✓ Once a credit card is used, the provider has received payment in full, and you are left to bear the burden - often at a high interest rate.
- ✓ If a bill is larger than you can handle in one lump sum, call the provider and inquire about other payment arrangements.

3. Avoid the assumption that your insurance will pay for everything.

- ✓ Understand your medical needs and the coverage that is provided through your health plan. If you have questions or concerns, call your provider immediately.
- ✓ Having health insurance is an advantage to keeping your out-of-pocket expenses down. However, it does not relieve you of the responsibility of making sure the insurance company pays medical claims accordingly.
- ✓ If you are not insured, or underinsured, other options exist. Seek out free or low-cost clinics, prescription assistance programs and use urgent care clinics instead of the emergency room whenever possible. State-sponsored insurance programs for children are available, and often have low-cost policies for parents.

4. Do not ignore your responsibilities.

- ✓ You are responsible for your medical bills, whether you have insurance or not.
- ✓ Don't hesitate to ask about discounts or hardship programs.
- ✓ A divorce decree does not alleviate your obligation to pay any bill incurred by a child or spouse during the marriage.
- ✓ Medical bills can be sent to collection agencies for non-payment in 90 days or less. Do not assume that any type of payment will suffice - call and make arrangements so you are prepared and have a written plan in place.

All too often, a single visit to the doctor can generate several bills: the provider, laboratory, specialist, etc. To ensure timely payment and ease your mind, use the tool below to keep track of important information regarding account numbers, amounts due and payments made.

Statement Name/ Provider	Date of Visit	Account Number	Total Amount Billed	Insurance Payment Amount	Compare EOB to Bill	My Payment Amount Due	Due Date	Paid	Notes
Example: ABC Clinic (dr. appt/check-up)	5/10	55589-2	\$150.00	\$120.00	Done - no errors found	\$30.00	7/13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A bill for lab work is to arrive soon.
								<input type="checkbox"/>	
								<input type="checkbox"/>	
								<input type="checkbox"/>	
								<input type="checkbox"/>	
								<input type="checkbox"/>	

The keys to managing medical care and bills are to understand your medical needs and know your coverage options. Remember, coding errors may prevent insurance payment of claims. Follow-up efforts with insurance or the provider can take time, but it is worth it - for both your physical well-being and your financial health.

Reliable education and counseling services are available at local Consumer Credit Counseling Service agencies. Call (605) 330-2700 or (888) 258-2227 to learn more or to schedule a confidential appointment.