How to Obtain and Share Your Medical Images



Today, you can view parts of your electronic health records (EHRs) online, including radiology reports (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/all-about-your-radiology-report) and images. Online access to health records allows patients to make more informed decisions about their healthcare with their doctors and share important health information and test results with other medical providers. Sharing information about your health electronically improves the safety, quality and speed of patient care.

Why should you obtain and share your medical images?

You may want copies of your medical images to bring with you to a doctor's appointment. Obtaining and storing copies of your own medical images may be helpful for patients who are:

- Seeing a physician for a second opinion
- Being referred to a specialist
- Receiving treatment for cancer or condition that requires monitoring over time
- Having a radiology exam at a new facility
- Keeping a comprehensive personal health record (PHR)

In case of an unscheduled doctor visit or medical emergency, quick access to your medical images and history may help prevent a delay in diagnosis or treatment.

Providing your doctor with access to your medical images and radiology reports allows them to:

- Compare new images with previous medical images (this is especially important for the radiologist interpreting your radiology exam)
- Monitor conditions and abnormalities over time
- Avoid repeating tests you've already had

Being able to review your medical images with your doctor may help you better understand your condition and participate in your care.

How to Obtain Your Medical Images

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guarantees you access to your medical imaging exams.

Your image files are typically stored at the facility where you had your exam. When you request your medical images, you will need to sign a release form. The images will typically be available as:

- printed photos (also known as radiology films). This is rarely done in the U.S. and usually only done for x-rays.
- a CD.

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- another electronic storage device (such as a flash drive).

How do you share your medical images?

CD or flash drives usually have programs on them that allow you to view the images. You can also use them to transfer your images to the computer system the radiologist uses to read your radiology test. Some facilities and hospitals can now transfer your images to another facility using the Internet. You should still obtain a "hard copy" via a CD or flash drive just to be safe.

You can also transfer the images from a CD or flash drive to a personal health record (PHR). A PHR is different from an electronic health record (EHR), which your healthcare provider creates and maintains. A PHR is a collection of information that you maintain and control in a safe location. In addition to imaging exams and radiology reports, it may include information about drug and food allergies, medications you take, and surgeries you've had. If you choose, you can provide your doctor with access to this information.

There are two types of PHRs:

- Standalone PHR – This is created by the patient and stored on their own computers or the Internet.
- Tethered or Connected PHR – This is linked to your electronic health record (EHR) at a specific hospital or health plan and accessed by you using a secure website.

Laws that protect the privacy of health information do not cover standalone PHRs. Federal laws only cover PHRs offered through a health provider or health plan covered by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/article-patient-privacy) (HIPAA) Privacy and Security Rules.

RSNA Image Share

This is a FREE service run by the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) that allows patients to store and access their medical images in an online PHR. Ask your health provider if they offer this service.

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Note: Images may be shown for illustrative purposes. Do not attempt to draw conclusions or make diagnoses by comparing these images to other medical images, particularly your own. Only qualified physicians should interpret images; the radiologist is the physician expert trained in medical imaging.

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