

How to Obtain and Share Your Medical Images

Many patients today are able to view parts of their electronic health records (EHR) online, including radiology reports and images. Online access to health records allows patients to make more informed decisions about their healthcare with their doctors. It also allows them to easily share important health information and test results with other medical providers. This can increase the safety, quality and efficiency of patient care.



Why should you obtain and share your medical images?

You may want to obtain copies of your medical images so that you can bring them 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
- Undergoing treatment for cancer or a medical condition that requires monitoring over time
- Having imaging performed at a new facility
- Keeping a comprehensive personal health record (PHR)

In case of an unscheduled doctor visit or medical emergency, having your own medical images as well as your detailed medical history may help prevent a delay in diagnosis or treatment.

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

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

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

How to Obtain Your Medical Images

You are guaranteed access to your medical imaging studies under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Your image files are typically stored at the facility where you had your exam. When you request your medical images, you will be asked to sign a release form. The images will typically be available in one of these formats:

- Printed photos (referred to as radiology films). This is rarely done in the U.S., and usually only done for x-rays
- A CD
- Another electronic storage device such as a flash drive

How do you share your medical images?

CD or flash drive devices usually have programs on them that allow you to view the images. They can also be used 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. It is still recommended that you get 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 is created and maintained by your healthcare provider. A PHR is a collection of information that you maintain and control in a secure location. In addition to imaging studies 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. Only PHRs offered through a health provider or health plan covered by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy and Security Rules are covered by federal laws.

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