



Quick Tips— When Getting Medical Tests

The single most important way you can stay healthy is to be an active member of your own health care team. One way to get high-quality health care is to find and use information and take an active role in all of the decisions made about your care. This card will help you when making decisions about medical tests.

Doctors order blood tests, x-rays, and other tests to help diagnose medical problems. Perhaps you do not know why you need a particular test or you don't understand how it will help you. Here are some questions to ask:

1. How is the test done?
2. What kind of information will the test provide?
3. Is this test the only way to find out that information?
4. What are the benefits and risks of having this test?
5. How accurate is the test?
6. What do I need to do to prepare for the test? (What you do or don't do may affect the accuracy of the test results.)
7. Will the test be uncomfortable?
8. How long will it take to get the results, and how will I get them?
9. What's the next step after the test?

One study found that anywhere from 10 percent to 30 percent of Pap smear test results that were called "normal" were not. Errors such as this can lead to a wrong or delayed diagnosis. You want your tests to be done the right way, and you want accurate results.

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What can you do?

- For tests your doctor sends to a lab, ask which lab he or she uses, and why. You may want to know that the doctor chooses a certain lab because he or she has business ties to it. Or, the health plan may require that the tests go there.
- Check to see that the lab is accredited by a group such as the College of American Pathologists (800-323-4040) or the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (telephone 630-792-5800; Web site <http://www.jcaho.org>).
- If you need a mammogram, make sure the facility is approved by the Food and Drug Administration. You can find out by checking the certificate in the facility. Or, call 800-4-CANCER 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. EST to find out the names and locations of certified facilities near you.

What about the test results?

- Do not assume that no news is good news. If you do not hear from your doctor, call to get your test results.
- If you and your doctor think the test results may not be right, have the test done again.

Remember, quality matters, especially when it comes to your health. For more information on health care quality and materials to help you make health care decisions, visit <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/pathqpack.htm>

