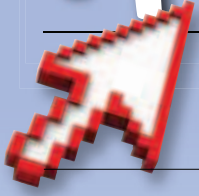# High-Tech Health

New options for your health

By Steven Peer

LATELY I'VE BEEN BARRAGED BY ALL THE NEW WAYS to digitally manage personal health data. The field is broad, from health bracelets to comprehensive health-data platforms that can be shared with family members, doctors, insurance companies, pharmacies, and so forth.

Happily, many of these are available at low or no cost. But before you can decide what might work for you, you must determine your needs. If you need simply to carry emergency information on your person, there are commercial solutions or you can do it yourself for next to nothing. If you want a solution that allows your physician easy access to your medical data by smartphone, there's an app for that, too!

Why go digital?

Going digital affords some of the same advantages that word processors gave us over typewriters and pencils—such as cutting-and-pasting, spell-checking, and embedding hyperlinks to other documents. Today many forms are sent to you electronically. Keeping them digital (as opposed to printing them out) allows you to more easily maintain and share them with others.

The most important advantage, however, is that going digital gives you the ability to have instant access to your health records anywhere, anytime. While at times this could present a lifesaving advantage, it can be extremely useful even if you use it only during routine doctor visits. I can't tell you how impressed my mother's doctor was when he asked about her medications during our last meeting. I slid a web address across his desk, and seconds later he was viewing our up-to-date spreadsheet of her medications.

We had simply created and stored a spreadsheet on Google Docs, which made it available on the web from any computer. We also created a word-processing health journal. And while Google Docs may be the most familiar name, they are not the only ones. Others include Zoho, Buzzword, Peepel, and Opengoo. Each of these allows the creator to set access levels and passwords to protect personal data.

Concerned about privacy?

Before subscribing to any online service, it's important to read over the End User License Agreement (EULA) and verify its integrity using the Better Business Bureau (BBB) or other such service. No matter which online service you choose, be sure to investigate the security options so your data remains private.

Most online documents allow you to assign privileges to users. Typical levels of security include *No Access*, *Read Only*, and *Rights to Edit*. Most services allow you to track changes to the documents by username and can alert you when changes are made. Some have robust *Undo* and *Revert* commands so you can recover from any accidental changes to the document.

If you don't want your data on the web, it can still be made portable simply by storing a copy on a flash drive that you keep with you. Almost anything can be stored on flash drives: forms, photos, journals, and records.

Getting started

Start by determining what information would be useful at a doctor's visit, in an emergency situation, or during your travels. Then build an online document (in Google Docs, for example, or another platform) to suit that. While you probably don't need all the categories below, it may be useful to have them as prompts:

- Personal information (you may want to include a photo)
- Health information (allergies, primary diagnosis, blood type, etc.)
- Assistive devices (artificial limbs, pacemaker, oxygen, etc.)
- Contact information (emergency contacts, caregivers, etc.)
- Medical references (primary doctor, specialists, primary hospital)
- Insurance (organization, member ID, phone, dental)
- Medications: Prescription
- Medications: Over-the-Counter
- Diagnostic data & health test history (annual, eye, hearing, lipid, etc.)
- Immunization history

You can modify what you use as you determine your real needs or as your needs change over time.

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Records
information

Third-party offerings

The plethora of health data could become overwhelming with a do-it-yourself solution. A number of companies have streamlined the collecting of health data by creating online platforms (note that some also allow for simplified sharing of data with others):

- **HealthVault.com.** A Microsoft product and the largest web-based platform for individuals and healthcare professionals to store and maintain health and fitness information. This has been embraced by many healthcare institutions (hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, etc)

- **CHADIS.com.** Allows parents to complete questionnaires about their child's development for treatment providers.
- **PatientsLikeMe.** A data-driven social networking health site where members can share conditions, treatments, and symptom information in order to monitor their health over time.
- **Google Health.** Google will be discontinuing this platform due to lack of widespread adoption.
- **kids4health.net.** ADHD-specific, insurance-paid, and doctor-"prescribed" to allow for comprehensive feedback (parents, teachers, etc) to a doctor or clinic.
- **myadhd.com.** ADHD-specific tracking, treatment, and assessment tools for those associated with ADHD (parents, adults, educators, and professionals); paid for by the user.

Smartphone apps and digital bracelets

During the course of my research, I kept bumping into exercise and diet apps for smartphones offered by health-oriented websites. Here are a few highly rated examples that adults affected by ADHD might find useful:

❯ Exercise Apps
runkeeper.com
mapmyrun.com
nikeplus.com
dailyburn.com
endomondo.com

❯ Diet Apps
intelli-Diet.com
dailyburn.com
myfitnesspal.com

If you simply want to carry emergency information on your person, there are a number of digital emergency health bracelets that can be purchased for under $30. The software built into these bracelets will prompt you by the various categories of health data you would need in an emergency situation.

Barcodes

In addition to pointing to websites or web-documents, the newer barcodes can actually contain your health data. They can be scanned with any camera-equipped smartphone with a barcode app. There are many websites that allow you to create such barcodes. I used Kaywa (kaywa.com) to create the two samples below. Limited to

250 characters, you can format your data to include whatever you need.

A barcode can be used to point to your online data. This example barcode points to chadd.org:

This barcode actually contains the health data for John Doe:

John Doe
123 Main Street
Mpls, MN, 12345
SSN 123-45-6789
jdoe@gmail.com
In Case of Emergency:
Jane Doe 123-456-7890
Mild Epilepsy
Meds:
250mg BID Keppra;
100mg BID Tegretol
Dr. Johnson 123-098-7654
Likes: CHADD Annual Conference,
Nov 10, Orlando

Watch for new solutions
Technology changes so fast that there may be newer solutions by the time you read this article. You may want to perform your own online search update using the keywords *Personal Health Record.* ⊘