

## To manage your health insurance:

**Medicare.gov** is where you sign up for, change, and get information on Medicare benefits. It is worth getting to know this site because you can use it annually to revise your health insurance based on anticipated needs. You can also find and compare information on a variety of doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, and other providers of health services.



**MedicareInteractive.org** is a free educational site for the nonprofit advocacy organization Medicare Rights Center. In addition to information that explains Medicare services, they offer a consumer helpline (800-333-4114) and will guide you in advocating for your rights when things go wrong, for example when you need to make an appeal after a denial of coverage. Helpline services are available in English and Spanish.



**SocialSecurity.gov** offers information and tools to plan for retirement, register for benefits (Social Security, Medicare, disability), and get replacement documents. This is where you would note a change of address for bank account direct deposits. Because of the sensitivity of the information you will be sharing on this site, expect extra steps to register and maintain your passwords.

Senior Benefits Information Centers (SBICs) are available to Westchester residents. They offer free, year-round walk-in hours at selected public libraries for personalized counseling on all Medicare topics. Find out more at [WestchesterLibraries.org/senior-benefits-information-centers/](http://WestchesterLibraries.org/senior-benefits-information-centers/)

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## Can't I just Google it?

Of course you can! Here are some tips for expanding your search to the World Wide Web.

- **Check your sources.** Many searches will produce a Google “Answer Box” as part of the result; this is titled “People Also Ask.” These potentially related questions are answered with text “snippets” that are pulled from websites that rank high for the search terms you entered. Sometimes you only get one snippet; other times—if the question could have multiple interpretations—you get more than one. These are not necessarily authoritative sources. You still need to evaluate the information you receive. (See the “Says Who” box).
- **Privacy.** Know that your search history in the Google search engine will be tracked—unless you disable a number of settings or use an “incognito window.” An alternative is to navigate to a search engine that doesn't collect search history such as DuckDuckGo.com.
- **Target your search.** You can specify the site you want to search (such as YouTube for videos). You can also search a specific phrase, which will narrow your results, which may be a better fit with your interests. For example, the search string—site:youtube.com “laser lithotripsy”—will return only videos from YouTube that include the phrase “laser lithotripsy” (a way to break-up kidney stones) in the description. Swap in other web sites and phrases for your own needs.
- **Use filters.** Explore the options listed under the main Google search box. From left to right, you can filter results by type of content, e.g., news or videos. Select “Tools” to reveal a menu that lets you sort results by date. Select “Settings” to get to “Advanced Search;” the options you see there are helpful when you want to exclude certain types of terms or find content from a specific geographic regions.



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# Essential Online Health Information For Older Adults

*Get the information you need.  
Know what to look for.*



We all need to become smart health information consumers, given how complicated it is to navigate health services and products today. *Essential Online Health Information for Older Adults* is a selected list of resources that can address typical health questions. In addition, it offers pointers on what to look for when evaluating information resources and receiving services.

For most health topics, start here:



**MedlinePlus.gov** is produced for health information consumers by the National Library of Medicine (NLM). The site provides authoritative, current information about diseases, conditions, and wellness issues in plain language. The site is available in English and Spanish.

Use MedlinePlus to learn about the latest treatments, learn about a drug or supplement, identify specialist associations, or view medical videos. You can also get links to the latest medical research on your topic and find out about clinical trials. Browse for your topic by body-location or the name of a disease or condition. The results of your search will include information collected from a variety of expert sources.

**X-Plain Patient Education Health Tutorials** offer illustrated, plain-language explanations of more than 1400 diseases, conditions, surgeries or procedures. This resource is available in English and Spanish. Go to **WestchesterLibraries.org** (go to the Research tab and then scroll down to the Health section).

### What's this pill?

To identify a specific OTC, generic or brand name pill that has become separated from its packaging, use the "Pill Identifier" at **RxList.com**.

### Taking a supplement?

To learn about evidence, uses and side effects, go to **Consumer Lab**, which conducts tests for purity, summarizes the science, and links you to the original research. This subscription resource is also available at **WestchesterLibraries.org** (go to the Research tab and then scroll down to the Health section).



### To find medical literature:



**PubMed.gov**, also produced by the NLM, contains 28 million citations to biomedical literature, many with abstracts and/or full text. The best way to search is via the Search box at the top of the web page. After a search, you can use filters to focus your results by type of article, availability of full text, and date. When you filter by "review" you'll find articles that summarize the current thinking on a topic. If you are going to come back often, set up an account so you can save your searches.

### To explore and stay current:



**McMasterOptimalAging.org** is produced by McMaster University, a Canadian university that runs a project focused on evidence-based approaches to "optimal aging." While policy discussions are Canadian specific, the health content is widely relevant and well-written. Browse their topics and sign up for blog updates.

### To compare doctors, hospitals, and other health services:

To evaluate a doctor, here are some things to consider:

- Is the doctor covered by your insurance?
- With which hospital is s/he affiliated?
- Is the doctor certified in their specialty?
- What has been their experience with malpractice?
- What are the office policies (like those related to wait times and billing) and how do the staff treat you?
- Is there an online portal where you can get results and send messages?

Some information will come directly from a physician's office. Some of this can be researched independently. Go to NY State's **NYDoctorProfile.com** for information on certification and malpractice. How you decide to weigh these different considerations depends on your needs.

The hospital you use is often determined by the physician who is caring for you. That's why it is important to know about hospital affiliations when you are choosing a doctor. **The Leapfrog Group** issues "Safety Grades" on more than 2500 hospitals. The grades include an assessment of how well a hospital protects its patients from errors, accidents, injuries and infections. The letter grades are clear; the information behind each score requires a

careful read to understand the implied risk. Throughout the site you'll find clear advice (and some helpful videos) on how to evaluate hospitals and stay safe. Go to **HospitalSafetyGrade.org**.

Information and a comparison tool to assess nursing homes, homecare, hospice providers, and other services is available at **Medicare.gov**.

### Legal help?

Legal issues can arise as part of managing your healthcare. Go to **Seniorlawday.info** to learn about opportunities in Westchester County for free workshops and consultations with professionals—lawyers, financial planners, geriatric care managers, long term care consultants—who can guide you to the right information and strategies for your needs.

## Says who?

Is this information any good? Give it a sniff test by considering the following as you review a piece of health information:

- **Current?** When was this published or posted? Has there been an update?
- **Relevant?** It may be interesting, but is it really answering your question in a way you can understand?
- **Authoritative?** Who exactly wrote this and are they qualified?
- **Accurate?** What tells you this is correct information? Is it a factual, scientific report or is it an emotional piece about one person's experience?
- **Purpose.** Was it written to inform, teach, sell, entertain or persuade? All are fine, but know what you are basing your decisions on!

*Use this information to guide your research and as a reminder that you can always go to your local library for personal assistance from information professionals ready to help you find what you need.*