

Know Your Rights in Healthcare

Healthcare should be a place where you feel safe and supported. Knowing your rights can help you get the care you deserve.



Your Rights: The Basics

Several laws protect your right to fair treatment in healthcare:

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
Ensures equal access to care. Providers must offer accommodations like sensory-friendly spaces or extended appointment time.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**
Prevents discrimination in federally funded programs, like hospitals that accept Medicaid or Medicare.
- **Affordable Care Act (ACA)**
Requires effective communication, including written instructions or assistive tools to meet your needs.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**
Covers health-related services tied to education plans (for those under 21).



Examples of Accommodations

You can request accommodations that meet your unique needs:

- **Sensory-Friendly Spaces**
Quiet rooms or dimmed lighting.
- **Extra Time**
Longer appointment slots to explain your needs.
- **Communication Help**
Written summaries, visual aids, or AAC device support.
- **Alternative Scheduling**
Online or email scheduling if phone calls are challenging.
- **Support Person**
Bring someone to assist with communication or emotional support.



Advocating for Your Rights

Several laws protect your right to fair treatment in healthcare:

1. Prepare in Advance

- Create an “All About Me” document outlining your needs and share it with your provider ahead of time.

2. Be Clear About Your Needs

- Use specific language, ex., “Bright lights make me uncomfortable; can we dim them during my visit?”

3. Bring a Support Person

- They can help advocate for you or provide reassurance during the appointment.

4. Know Where to Report Issues

- File complaints with the U.S. Department of Justice under the ADA or contact a hospital’s patient advocate.



Tips For Healthcare Providers

- **Listen Without Judgment:** Be open to understanding the unique needs of each patient.
- **Proactively Offer Accommodations:** Don’t wait for patients to ask—offer options like sensory-friendly settings or extra time.
- **Use Clear Communication:** Avoid medical jargon, and ask if your patient prefers written or verbal explanations.
- **Ask and Confirm:** Check in with the patient to make sure they feel heard and supported.



Helpful Resources

- Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs):
 - Assistance with Medicaid, accommodations, and local resources
- Harvard Health’s Guide on Healthcare Rights for Autistic Patients
 - Learn more about your rights: Harvard Health
- Autism and Health: Know Your Rights
 - Visit: Autism and Health

Remember

You have the right to care that meets your needs. Being prepared and knowing your rights can make healthcare experiences more inclusive and supportive. Share this tool with others to help create more inclusive healthcare for everyone.