

# KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Benefit and insurance issues important to you - brought to you by the insurance specialists at: ABC Company



## Be a Wise Health Care Consumer

### 25 Ways to Reduce Your Health Care Costs

The way we purchase health care is unlike most other purchases we make. Many Americans will search through a newspaper for a coupon that saves them 50 cents at the local supermarket. However, when it comes to health care—a far more complex and expensive service—we rarely ask questions or consider all the options that could save us time and money.

Learn to shop for value when it comes to health care. With little effort you can save thousands of dollars on your medical bills.

- 1. Let's make a deal.** Ask your doctor, hospital or dentist if they will accept less. Studies show that the majority of individuals who bargain succeed.
- 2. Know how much it costs.** You will be better armed to negotiate discounts when you know the real costs of care. You can find rates on the websites of large insurers like UHC, Cigna and Aetna.
- 3. Pay in cash.** You can often save up to 10 percent on your bill by paying in cash up front. Doctors lose thousands of dollars each year on credit card processing fees, unpaid bills and collection fees.

- 4. Look at your bill closely.** You will often find mistakes. Keep track of your visits, tests and medications, and compare them against your bills. Request a corrected bill if you find an error and notify your insurance company.

“

With these 25 tips, you can learn to shop for value to get the most out of your health care dollars.

”

- 5. Follow instructions.** Follow your health care provider's instructions for medications. Most medications work most effectively when they are used according to doctor's instructions. Ignoring instructions could result in additional prescription costs, extra trips to the doctor or even hospitalization.

- 6. Visit a retail health clinic.** Retail health clinics are growing in numbers. They are popping up in high-traffic retail outlets in metropolitan areas around the country. While these clinics lack the personal nature of seeing a family physician who knows your complete medical history, their appeal is the convenience and low prices advertised for all to see.
- 7. Stay in-network.** Your medical costs can increase greatly when you visit a provider not in your plan's network. Make sure your primary care doctor and any specialists you may need to see are in your network whenever possible.
- 8. It doesn't hurt to ask.** If you must see a specialist who isn't within your network, call your insurance company's pre-certification department and explain why you must use an out-of-network specialist. Often times you can get your insurance company to agree to pay at in-network rates in order to avoid the expensive appeal process. If that doesn't work, ask your specialist to accept the in-network rate.

# BENEFITS

9. **Understand what treatment your plan covers.** Are you paying for chiropractic care, massage therapy and acupuncture? Check your insurance company's website or call their customer service line to make sure you aren't needlessly paying for health care that is covered by your insurance.
10. **Stay insured.** Generally it is cheaper to stay on your employer's plan rather than going on your own. If you are considering leaving your job in the next year, make the change to the lowest cost plan during your open enrollment period. After you quit, COBRA allows you to stay on your employer's health plan for up to 18 months. You pay the cost.
11. **Fight back.** If your claim has been denied, start with a phone call to customer service. If that doesn't work, follow your plan's appeal process. Remember to document everything and keep copies.
12. **Choose your health plan wisely.** Choosing the plan with the lowest premiums or sticking with the same plan year to year may not be the smartest option. Anticipate your family's medical expenses and look closely at each plan option to find the most appropriate and cost-effective one for you.
13. **Consider an HSA.** Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) are growing in popularity. They are combined with a high-deductible health plan. The high-deductible policy protects you from the cost of a catastrophic illness or prolonged hospitalization. You control the savings account and use it for small and routine health care expenses. You will save about \$1,500 in taxes for every \$5,000 you put into an HSA. Funds you don't use grow tax-free and can be rolled over from year to year.
14. **Take advantage of flexible spending accounts.** A flexible spending account, or FSA, is an employee benefit program that allows you to set aside money on a pretax basis for certain health care and dependent care expenses. That means you keep more of your money. For every \$1,000 you put in, you'll save approximately \$300 in taxes.
15. **Don't skimp on preventive care.** Be sure your child gets routine checkups and vaccines as needed, both of which can prevent medical problems (and bills) down the road. Also, adults should get preventive screenings recommended for their age to detect health conditions early.
16. **Look for free services.** Search around for free health screenings and vaccinations in your area. With a little research, you could find free or reduced-price flu shots, Pap smears, prostate exams, cholesterol screenings and more.
17. **Visit a dental school.** Look into local dental schools where you will be treated by dental students, who perform the dental treatment closely supervised by their instructors. Expect to pay about 20 to 60 percent of what you'd pay for the same treatment by a private dentist.
18. **Don't forget to floss.** Studies have demonstrated that those who floss regularly have a decrease in periodontal disease, bad breath and cavity incidence. The cost of periodontal disease treatment can range from \$200 to \$2,000 per procedure.
19. **Discount contacts.** Discount websites and stores can provide the exact contact lenses prescribed by your eye doctor, in factory-sealed packaging, at savings of up to 70 percent off what you would pay at the retail level.
20. **Chill out.** Over 60 percent of doctor visits are for stress-related conditions. Studies show that relaxation techniques are effective in controlling anxiety, enhancing the immune system and reducing conditions such as high blood pressure, substance abuse and chronic pain.
21. **Quit smoking.** On average, health care costs are \$1,600 per year for a smoker. Plus, if you quit smoking you can expect to save approximately \$1,800 a year on the cost of cigarettes alone.
22. **Live a healthy lifestyle.** Focus on eating nutritiously, cutting down on fast food and getting more physical exercise. Striving toward a healthier lifestyle and maintaining a healthy weight can drastically reduce future medical conditions and diseases.
23. **Wash your hands.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hand hygiene is the most important factor in preventing the spread of germs. In fact, health experts estimate that 80 percent of common infections are spread through hand contact. Save hundreds of dollars a year on cold and flu treatments.
24. **Get a second opinion.** Save thousands of dollars a year on cutting-edge medical tests, which usually are not covered by insurance by following the guidelines recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force – [www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm).
25. **Think twice about the emergency room.** Don't ever go to the emergency room (ER) when your regular doctor or an urgent care visit would suffice. If you or your child is feeling ill on Friday, get into the doctor that day to avoid overpaying at the ER during the weekend.