

## 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.*

Blood tests, x-rays, and other tests are used to help diagnose medical problems. If you do not know why you need a particular test or how it will help you, here are some questions to ask your health care provider:



- How is the test done?
- What kind of information does it provide?
- Is this test the only way to find out that information?
- What are the benefits and risks of having this test?
- How accurate is it?
- How do I prepare for the test?  
(What you do or don't do can affect the accuracy of the results.)
- Is the test uncomfortable?
- How long will it take to get the results, and how will I get them?
- 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.

## What can you do?

- For tests your health care provider sends to a lab, ask which lab he or she uses, and why. Perhaps he or she has business ties to it. Maybe a health or insurance plan specifies only that lab.
- Check 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 (630-792-5800 or [www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)).
- If you need a mammogram, make sure the facility is approved by the Food and Drug Administration. If it is, there will be a certificate displayed in the facility.

## What about the test results?

- Do not assume that no news is good news. If you do not hear from your health care provider, call to get your test results.
- If you and your health care provider 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>



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
Advancing Excellence in Health Care • [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

This publication was produced in cooperation with AHRQ/DHHS.  
It may be reproduced without permission. AHRQ Pub. No. 01-0040b