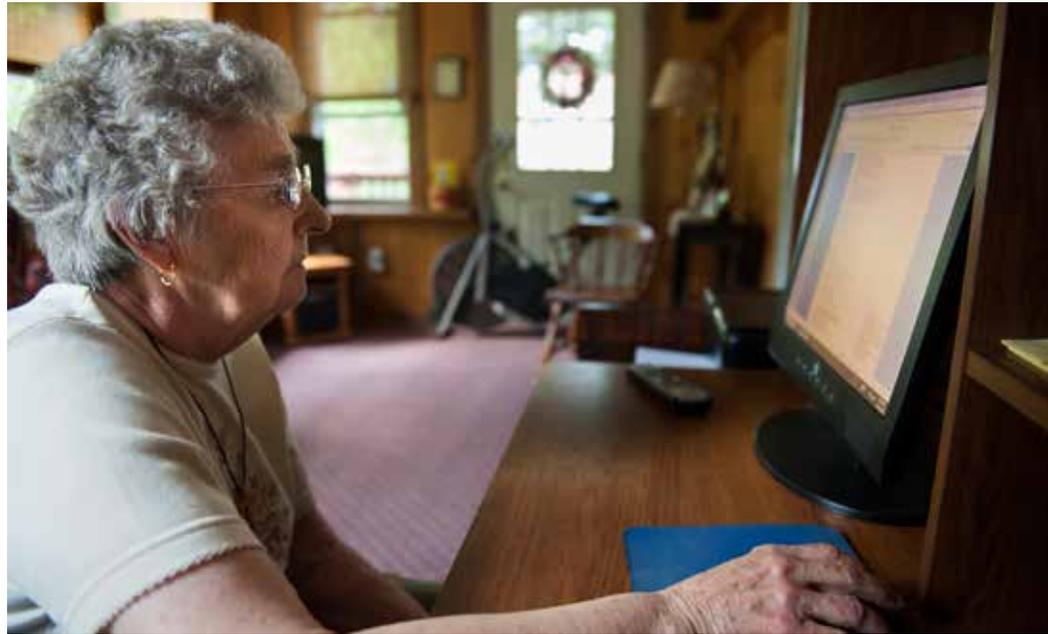




Patient FAQ

This FAQ answers common questions your patients may have. It also highlights policy decisions institutional leaders may want to consider and communicate to patients prior to launching OpenNotes.



Sample FAQs

- What is OpenNotes®?
- What is a note?
- What are the benefits of reading notes?
- How can I get the most out of my notes?
- I can't see any of my notes or a specific note I expected to see. Why?
- What if I have questions about information in the note?
- I've sent my clinician a message about my notes but haven't heard back. When can I expect a response?
- I'm concerned about privacy. Who else has access to this information? Can my clinician share this record with others without telling me?
- How can I send general suggestions or thoughts about OpenNotes? Whom should I contact?

Other questions

Further questions follow, but we have left the responses blank because they rely on institution-specific policies and information systems. They suggest kinds of questions you may need to address. You can e-mail myopennotes@bidmc.harvard.edu to request a more detailed example of BIDMC's patient FAQs.

- How do I get started?
- When will I be able to read my notes?
- Where do I find my notes?
- How do I find out whether my clinician is using OpenNotes?
- What notes will I see?
- How will I know I have a new note?
- How soon after a visit or a discussion will I be able to see my notes?
- If I switch clinicians, can I still see my notes from my prior clinician?
- If I don't want to see my notes online, what can I do?
- Can I share my note with other people? How?
- What if I have questions about information in the note?
- I have concerns about something I read in my notes, or I may have found an error. Whom should I contact?

You are welcome to use or adapt this document. Please acknowledge Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center as the original source. You may want to add or modify the sample responses below to ensure alignment with your own institutional policies.

This document is geared toward patients. Please see the "Clinician FAQ" for additional content directed toward clinicians.



What is OpenNotes?

OpenNotes is an initiative that starts by offering patients ready access to the health care notes doctors, nurses and other clinicians write after a clinical appointment or discussion. Opening notes helps patients to read material that, through the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), is already theirs to review and copy if they so desire.

In 2010, 100 volunteering doctors and 20,000 of their patients completed a one-year, multicenter trial of OpenNotes. In this research and demonstration project, primary care doctors invited patients to read their visit notes after they were signed. At the end of the year, patients overwhelmingly supported the program and cited multiple health benefits. Doctors saw benefits for patients and little burden for themselves. And both patients and doctors wanted to continue to share notes.

To read the study results, please go to annals.org/article.aspx?articleid=1363511.

What is a note?

When you see a clinician for an appointment, you may notice him or her taking notes during the visit. After the visit (or any discussion with you), the clinician composes a note summarizing the most important information. This becomes a part of your medical record.

The note may contain:

- A **summary of what you told the clinician**– also called the “history” or “history of present illness”
 - The **findings from a physical exam**, such as your blood pressure or how your lungs sound
 - **Lab, radiology, pathology, or other results** that help the clinician assess your condition
 - The clinician’s **assessment or diagnosis** of any medical conditions or symptoms – also called “Assessment” or “Impressions”
 - The **treatment plan** the clinician recommends
 - **Next steps** recommended or planned, such as additional tests, studies, follow-up appointments, or referrals to a specialist
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What are the benefits of reading notes?

In the 2010 research study, patients who read their notes reported several benefits. These included:

- Better understanding of their health and medical conditions,
- Improved recall of their care plan,
- Feeling more in control of their care,
- Taking better care of themselves, and
- Doing better at taking their medications as prescribed.

Reading notes can also help strengthen the partnership between you and your clinicians. To learn more, go to myopennotes.org.

How can I get the most out of my notes?

- When your note is available after your visit, read it to review what you discussed with your clinician, your treatment plan, any changes to your medications, and any follow-up tests or appointments you need to schedule or attend. If there are terms you don’t understand, look them up, or ask your practice for reliable websites or other resources to learn more about your medical conditions.
 - Between visits you can read your note to review whether you are following the treatment plan and to make sure you follow up on procedures, tests or appointments.
 - Any interaction between you and your clinician is confidential. However, you may choose to share notes with your family members, caregivers or others involved in your care and discuss how you are going to work together to carry out your plans.
 - In preparation for your next visit, read your note to remind yourself of what you discussed with your health care provider at your last appointment. Think about any steps you have taken since your last visit and any changes or new problems you may be experiencing since your last visit. You can also review your past visits, consider what has happened since then, and then prepare a list of questions to review with your clinician at the appointment.
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I can't see any of my notes or a specific note I expected to see. Why?

Possible reasons include:

- **You may need to locate the note.**
- **The note may have been written before OpenNotes started.**
- **The clinician may not be sharing notes.**
- **The note may not be ready.** After the clinician writes and approves the note electronically, the note will become available.
- **Your clinician may have chosen not to share this particular note.** If you have questions, we encourage you to talk with your clinician or your clinician's practice to make sure you understand his or her reasons for not making your note available.

If you have further questions, please contact your clinician or clinician's office.

What if I have questions about information in the note?

Please keep in mind that the note is part of your medical record. Doctors and/or other clinicians use the note to manage your individual circumstances and to communicate efficiently with others involved in your care. You may find the note difficult to read because it includes unfamiliar abbreviations or terms. Here is a [list of common abbreviations](#) to help you better understand medical terms or diagnoses. You can also refer to "How can I get the most out of my notes?"

Many other online resources can help you better understand your medical condition or medical terms in the note. If you have a question, you can perform a quick online search, write down the question to discuss with your clinician at the next visit, or contact your clinician's office. At your next visit, you may want to ask your clinician about good websites or other resources to use when you have questions about your particular condition.

I've sent my clinician a message about my notes but haven't heard back. When can I expect a response?

- Sometimes it may take several days or longer for your clinician to respond. It's a good idea to ask your clinician how quickly he or she generally responds, so you have an idea of what to expect.
- Do NOT use e-mail to communicate with your clinician about concerns that need immediate attention. **If you have a medical emergency** please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. If you have an urgent question or concern, call your clinician or go to the nearest emergency room.

I'm concerned about privacy. Who else has access to my notes? Can my clinician share this record with others without telling me?

All clinicians involved in your care already have access to this information. Clinicians operate under strict confidentiality rules. To help ensure your privacy, please keep in mind:

- Keep your login name and password private.
- Wherever you look at your account, always exit by selecting "Sign out" when you are done.

How can I send general suggestions or thoughts about OpenNotes? Whom should I contact?

If you have a specific comment about your own notes, please contact your clinician. For general suggestions or thoughts about OpenNotes, please e-mail:[insert contact information]

*If you would like to read notes from visits or discussions **before** your doctor joined OpenNotes, please note that you have the legal right to request your medical records.