

Organizing Your Important Information – Part 3 What to Carry – and Not Carry -- in Your Wallet

By Elaine Wiant and Carole Larkin

Q. I know I should carry emergency information with me about myself, but what about my children and parents?

A. It's a good idea to carry in your wallet or purse information about yourself, your spouse, your children and your parents. If you might be contacted about an emergency of another person, you should have that person's emergency information with you. We suggest a wallet card of information for each person for whom you are an emergency contact. A sample wallet card is available at www.thirdageservices.com.

Q. What specific information should be included in the wallet card?

A. Here is our suggested list:

- Name
- Date of Birth
- Phone numbers
- Primary physician with phone number
- Specialty physicians (as appropriate) with phone number
- Health insurance Co, policy number, phone number
- Allergies
- Blood type
- Medical conditions
- Medications
- Surgeries
- Location of Advanced Directive
- Neighbor name and phone number
- Religion, clergy and phone number
- Emergency contact and phone number

Q. I have heard people talk about an “ICE” phone number for my mobile phone. What is that?

A. ICE stands for “In case of emergency”. It's a good idea to program the number for your primary emergency contact and program the name as “ICE”. If you have a medical emergency, the emergency response professionals know to check your mobile phone for this number.

Q. My driver license used to have organ donation information on the back. How do I handle permission for organ donation in an emergency?

- A. The Department of Public Safety offers the “Live and Then Give” pamphlet to people who visit a Driver License office. The pamphlet has a detachable card to complete and carry as evidence of intent to be an eye, tissue, or organ donor. A small sticker stating “Donor” is also included and may be placed on the front of the license or ID card. A sample donor card is also available at www.thirdageservices.com.

The back of your driver license also has a place for your emergency contact number, drug allergy, and a phone number for your directive to physician. Be sure to complete that information, since it is probably the first place emergency response professionals will look.

- Q. What should I NOT carry in my wallet or purse?

- A. The most important item to NOT carry with you is your social security card. The Social Security Administration recommends that you show your card to your employer when you start a job and then put it in a safe place until you need it again.

Similarly, you should NOT carry your Medicare card, since the Medicare number is also your social security number. If you need it for an appointment with a new doctor, carry it to that appointment and then put it away. You may choose to make a copy of the card without the number on it or with only the last four digits of the number.

If your health insurance policy number is your social security number, treat it with the same care as a Medicare card. Then write to your insurance company and ask them to change the way they assign policy numbers. Many companies have already stopped using social security numbers for policy number.

Contact ThirdAge Services for more information on these and other issues relating to older adults at 214-741-4397 or 214-649-1392 or ewiant@thirdageservices.com.

Carole Larkin is a Geriatric Care Manager with an M.A. degree in Applied Gerontology from University of North Texas. Elaine Wiant is a Certified Fraud Examiner and Fellow of the Society of Actuaries. They are owners of ThirdAge Services LLC, a provider of care services and financial services to older adults and their families and friends.