

**Using Health Apps**

Health apps may be used by individuals to track their health information, store their health records, monitor their health, gather health-related data, and provide remote care. The use of mobile devices and wireless technology allows an individual to carry this information with them. However, these apps contain sensitive personal information and unless they are properly protected and secured, they may place that information and/or the device at risk.

HIPAA’s Privacy and Security regulations only apply to covered entities (health plans, healthcare clearing houses and most healthcare providers) and their business associates. Unless the health app is developed by a covered entity, or one of their contractors, there is no assurance that it will be HIPAA compliant. Howard Center does not provide, sponsor, or endorse any health apps.

When selecting a health app, care should be taken before loading any of your personal information into it. We’ve attached the Federal Trade Commission’s Think Before You Click! – Five Tips to Help You Protect Your Health Data and Stay Safe When Using Health Apps.

Below are additional resources on protecting your information and devices resources:

* The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has posted Health App Use Scenarios & HIPAA. It is a tool that outlines how the HIPAA Rules apply when working with third-party apps. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr-health-app-developer-scenarios-2-2016.pdf>
* The USHHS OCR also has a website, Protecting the Privacy and Security of Your Health Information When using Your Personal Cell Phone or Tablet, that provides guidance on how patients can keep their location and activity private as well as tools to increase privacy. <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/guidance/cell-phone-hipaa/index.html>
* The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology website, How Can You Protect and Secure Health Information When Using a Mobile Device?, provides tools for patients to protect and secure their information when using mobile devices. <https://www.healthit.gov/topic/privacy-security-and-hipaa/how-can-you-protect-and-secure-health-information-when-using-mobile-device>
* Lastly, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website, How to Protect Your Privacy on Apps, provides guidance on how to protect your privacy while using apps on mobile devices. <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-protect-your-privacy-apps>

If you suspect that the privacy or security of your health information has been compromised or breached by a HIPAA covered entity health app, you may file a complaint with the covered entity that provided or sponsored the app or with the USHHS at <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/filing-a-complaint/index.html>

If you suspect that the privacy or security of your health information has been compromised or breached by a non-HIPAA covered entity, you may file a complaint with the FTC <https://consumer.ftc.gov/>