

An Apple a Day Keeps Identity Theft Away

11/10/11

By Administrator

When you go to a doctor for the first time, you'll be asked to fill out forms with all kinds of personal information. Sometimes that will include your Social Security number. Patients often want to know: do I really have to give this information to the doctor's office? This is not an easy question to answer.

Why Do They Ask For It?

Generally, doctors want your Social Security number to:

- *Help track you down if the bill isn't paid.*
- *Differentiate you from someone else.*

Is It Legal?

There is no federal law that bars doctors or other businesses from asking for your Social Security number. Some states have laws that restrict requests for Social Security numbers or prohibit denying goods for services to individuals who decline to provide them; check with your state or local consumer protection agency. If there is no law that applies to the situation, it's possible that you could be turned away if you won't give your Social Security number.

Why Should You Care?

Your Social Security number is the key that unlocks your identity. If someone steals it – for instance, a dishonest employee in the doctor's office, or a computer hacker who gets into a patient database – that information could be used to impersonate you to gain access to your accounts, obtain a job, credit, or utility services, or for other fraudulent purposes. According to one recent [report](#), privacy breaches at health care providers, including employees "snooping" into patient records, are a significant problem.

What Can You Do If You Don't Want To Provide It?

- *Try simply leaving that space on the form blank.*
- *If you're asked to fill in the blank, explain why you would prefer not to. If they insist, ask why it's necessary and if you can provide other information, such as your driver's license number, instead.*
- *If that doesn't work, find another doctor who won't insist on having your Social Security number.*

To learn more, read the [Fact Sheet](#) about Social Security numbers from the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, a nonprofit privacy organization. The PRC also answers [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about Social Security Numbers.