

# 10 Ways to Reduce Paper Usage in Your Office

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Paper can be found in nearly every aspect of a medical office – the sign-in forms at the reception area, paper on exam room tables, paper towels in the bathroom and paper cups in the break room, just to name a few. There are many different places and many different ways to cut back on your paper consumption.

Beyond the most obvious way to save paper – switching from paper medical records to an electronic medical records (EMR) system – our eco-friendly tips are easy to implement and follow. They don't take a lot of effort, but they will have a big impact on the environment. And, as an added benefit, they might even have a positive impact on your bottom line.

## Determine your current usage

It's important to know how much paper your office uses so you can accurately measure whether your efforts to cut usage are effective. You should take a moment to think about where and how your office uses paper, along with the frequency and type of paper used. You should also do a quick accounting to figure out how much money you're spending on paper products annually.

## Print and copy on both sides

Just like there are two sides to every story, there are two sides to every piece of paper. You can set office copier defaults to print on both sides of paper to reduce waste. Likewise, you can use both sides of paper to print documents, a process called "duplexing".

## Pick recycled paper products

If you absolutely must use paper products, you can reduce your environmental impact by choosing recycled paper products and paper products that can be recycled. The cost of paper products that are partially or completely made from recycled paper is not as high as it used to be, nor is it as expensive as you might think.

## Choose products with minimal packaging

A great deal of paper waste is actually created from packaging. Similar to the concept of using cloth bags to carry your groceries, you can choose products from suppliers and manufacturers that either eschew unnecessary packaging or use minimal paper packaging.

## Expand your margins and change your font

When you print documents, consider changing the margins and font. Increasing the margin allows you to cram more words on a single sheet of paper. Likewise, changing your font to a smaller size or a font that takes up less space will increase the number of words that can fit on a piece of paper. You can even reduce the amount of space between each line.

## Limit meeting handouts

Even though no one really likes meetings, these events seem to happen with regularity. And inevitably, paper handouts are provided. From agendas to presentations, meetings are big offenders when it comes to paper consumption. The easy solution is to use presentation software instead of paper and send the presentation electronically or through web conference.

## Reduce your junk mail

The average business receives thousands of pounds of advertisements and direct mail pieces – you probably call it junk mail and throw it directly into the recycling bin, we hope. You might even receive more than one of the same direct mail pieces because they're addressed to different people within your organization. Why not contact the advertiser or marketer and ask them to consolidate their names so you only receive one piece of mail. Or you could suggest that they only send their advertisements via e-mail.

## Invest in electronic fax services

On any given day, your fax is probably jammed with paper or not receiving transmissions properly. Think about bypassing the fax machine and using an electronic fax service, which can both send and receive faxes directly from your computer. Not only will you save space formerly occupied by the bulky machine, an electronic fax service is also more secure – documents aren't visible to all eyes – and will help you adhere to HIPAA requirements.

## Change your drinking habits

If your office runs on coffee – and whose doesn't, right? – replace the coffee maker in your break room with one that uses screens instead of paper filters. Use glass mugs instead of paper cups for your coffee and tea and do away with the paper cups at the water station.

## Improve your recycling efforts

When you can't avoid using paper, make sure that you at least recycle the paper you do use. All too often, paper that can be recycled ends up in the trash because a recycling bin isn't close by or because it's too inconvenient to recycle. You should make it easy for your employees and patients to recycle by posting recycling receptacles in central locations throughout your practice, as well as in exam rooms and individual desks/workstations.