

Health Facts

Preparing for a Doctor's Visit

If you have to go to the doctor, you want to get the most from your visit. Few doctors have much time for individual patients, so it's important to be prepared before your visit, and to understand what information to provide and questions to ask. So keep these points in mind:



Get Informed Beforehand. Before your visit, learn as much as you can about your particular problem. Armed with this information, you'll be in a better position to ask your doctor the right kind of questions. You can find a great deal of helpful information on the internet at sites like <http://medlineplus.gov> and others, or at your local public library.

Write Down Your Problem. Take the time to write down a list of the problems or symptoms you're experiencing. For example, you might jot down thoughts about where it hurts, what times of day you feel the most pain, how often and how much it hurts, and what seems to help the most in making you feel better.

Be Open With Your Doctor. When you see the doctor, be open and honest about your condition. Tell your doctor if you haven't followed the treatment regimen he or she has prescribed for you in an earlier visit, and describe any side effects you've experienced in connection with this treatment. If the doctor doesn't have a copy of your medical record, bring one to the visit. You can get a copy from your last doctor.

Keep in mind these questions to ask your doctor:

- What's happening to my body?
- What is the purpose of the treatment that you're suggesting? How will it help me? Could a less invasive treatment offer the same benefit?
- How much does it cost? Is there a more cost-effective way to get the same benefit?
- Are there other options for relieving symptoms or dealing with the underlying condition?
- What are this treatment's side effects?
- Will the medicine you're prescribing interact with any other medicines I'm currently taking?
- Is there anything I should do or not do? Are there lifestyle changes that I should be making?
- What are my follow-up responsibilities?

Tell Your Doctor About Your Medications. Make sure that your doctor understands all the medications you're taking, including supplements and non-prescription or herbal medicines. Preparing a list beforehand is a good idea. Let the doctor know if you've experienced adverse drug reactions in the past. Pay attention to what the doctor says, and take notes if you don't think that you'll remember later. In some situations it may be worth bringing along a friend or relative to help you remember.

For more information, visit www.ahrq.gov > Consumers and Patients > Quality of Care > Quick Tips When Talking to Your Doctor.