



Tips for your doctor's visit

Your visit to the doctor is your time to talk and learn about your health. Patients have a role in their health care, just like doctors, nurses and other caregivers. This brochure includes tips for your visit to the doctor to help you become more active and involved in your health care.

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The Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.

Helping health care organizations help patients

Talking with your doctor

What you can do to prepare for your doctor's visit.

Take all of your prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbs with you when you visit the doctor. If you're unable to take them with you, take a current list of all the medicines, vitamins, and herbs that you take. Include how much you take.

Write down the following information to share with your doctor:

- Your health history. Include allergies and bad reactions you have had to medicines, and the dates of any surgeries and hospital visits.
- Your current health problems.
- Any questions that you want to ask about your health.

What can you do if you don't understand what your doctor is saying?

Tell the doctor you do not understand. Ask more questions to help the doctor understand what you need. Tell the doctor if you need someone who speaks your language or who knows sign language. Ask a trusted friend or family member to come with you.

What if you are too embarrassed to talk about your health problems?

It may help to write your health problems and symptoms down on paper to give to the doctor. A friend or family member may be able to help you talk to the doctor about your problem.

Ask about any new medicines your doctor prescribes:

- Why do you need a new medicine? How will it help you?
- What is the name of the medicine?
- Is there a generic medicine you can take?
- Is there a medicine on your insurance company's formulary that will work for you?
- Is the medicine a liquid or a pill?
- What are the directions for taking the medicine? Repeat the directions back to the doctor. Ask the doctor to write down the directions.
- What are the side effects?
- Can you take it with your current medicines? Should you stop taking any of your current medicines?
- Should you avoid any foods or drinks when you take the medicine?
- Would the medicine still work if you use half of it? As an example, can you cut a pill in half?

Remind your doctor about your allergies and reactions you have had to medicines. Tell the doctor if you don't understand any information about the medicine. Ask your doctor to give you an updated printed list of all your medicines.

Why is the doctor asking personal questions?

The doctor needs to know about your habits so he or she can recommend the best treatment for you. Tell the doctor if you smoke, use recreational drugs, or are sexually active. The doctor can only talk to others about your health with your written permission.

Your doctor is sending you to another doctor—why?

Your doctor may send you to see a specialist. Specialists include heart doctors and doctors who treat cancer. Ask why the doctor recommends that you see another doctor.

Tips for the examination

What can you do if you are uncomfortable being examined by the doctor?

Tell the doctor or nurse how you can be made more comfortable. Let them know if you would like a nurse or a family member or friend to stay with you.

Don't be afraid to ask the doctor or caregiver if they washed their hands.

Doctors, nurses and other caregivers usually wash their hands but they can forget. Remind them if you don't see them wash their hands. Hand washing helps prevent infection.

Make sure the doctor or caregiver wears clean gloves before examining you.

Ask them to wear clean gloves before giving shots, touching wounds, or examining your mouth or private parts.

If you need a lab test

Questions to ask the doctor if you need a lab test:

- Why is this test being done? What will it tell you about my health?
- Are there any foods or drinks I should avoid before or after the test?
- Should I take my medicine before the test?
- Is there anything else I need to do to prepare for the test?
- Are there any side effects of the test? Will it be painful or uncomfortable? Is it unusual to have pain or discomfort?
- Should I have the test done before my next visit to the doctor?
- Will I need someone to take me home after the test?

If you need treatment or surgery

Find out about your condition and treatments for it.

Ask for written information about your conditions and treatments. Ask how and if a treatment will help you. Find out about risks of the treatments.

What can you do to prepare for your treatment?

Ask for copies of your health records from your doctor. Your records belong to you. It may take some time to get copies and there may be a cost.

Questions to ask the doctor if you need to have an operation:

- Are there any vitamins, herbs, or prescription or over-the-counter medicines that you should not take before your operation?
- Can you eat or drink before your operation?
- Should you trim your nails and remove any nail polish?

After your doctor's visit

Learn more about your condition.

Information can be found at the library, from support groups and reliable Web sites. Searching for a Web site is easy. Just type your disease or diagnosis into the search box on your computer's Internet search engine, such as Google.

What if you are not sure about the treatment or operation?

Make an appointment with another doctor to get a second opinion.

How can you find out if the hospital or facility you plan to go to is a good one?

- Find out if the organization is accredited by The Joint Commission. Accredited means that the organization follows rules that guide safe and quality patient care. Visit The Joint Commission's Quality Check Web site at www.qualitycheck.org.
- Talk to your doctor. Ask about the organization's experience taking care of people with your condition. How often do they perform the procedure you need? What special care do they provide to help patients get well?