

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

The time you have with your doctor is very important to your health. So be sure to ask questions, explain any new symptoms or problems and share your concerns.

Here are some ways to help you get ready for your next appointment:

## Before you go to the doctor

- **Make a list of your questions and concerns.** Put your most important questions and concerns at the top of your list.
- **Make a list of all the medications you are taking to give to your doctor.** This includes drugs (prescription and non-prescription), vitamins, and other natural remedies such as herbal products.
- **Call your doctor's office about health screenings and vaccinations.** Ask questions if you are not sure which screenings or shots you need and how often you need them.
- **Call before your visit to tell the office if you have special needs.** Ask for an interpreter if you do not speak or understand English well.
- **Ask a friend or family member to come with you, if you think it will be helpful.** This person can help listen, take notes and offer support.

## At the doctor's office or clinic

- **Go over your list of questions or concerns with your doctor or nurse.** Ask your most important questions first.
- **Take notes.** This will help you to remember everything your doctor says, and to follow your doctor's instructions.
- **Discuss your symptoms if you have a health problem, and any recent changes you may have noticed.** Tell your doctor or nurse how you feel when you have symptoms, and let him or her know if they have changed, appeared more frequently, or become worse.
- **Answer all of your doctor's questions.** Be honest about your diet and sexual history, how much you exercise and whether you smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs. Don't leave anything out because you're embarrassed; your doctor and nurse have probably heard it before.
- **Describe any allergies to medications, foods, pollen or other things.** Also, tell your doctor about your family's health history.

- **Tell your doctor or nurse if you may be pregnant or if you are trying to get pregnant.** Some medications are not safe if you are pregnant or about to become pregnant.
- **Tell your doctor or nurse if you are being treated by other doctors.** This includes mental health professionals.

### Ask questions about prescriptions, treatments and test results

- **Ask questions about your condition.** Ask your doctor how you can learn more about your condition or if there are specific things you can do to ease your symptoms.
- **Ask about your treatment.** Ask your doctor how long different treatments will take and whether there are side effects (and what to do if they occur). Also, find out which treatments are covered by your health insurance.
- **Prepare for tests, if your doctor orders any.** Ask your doctor what you need to do to get ready and if there are any side effects. Also, ask when you can expect results.
- **Always follow up to get test results.** Call your doctor's office and ask for your results if you do not hear from your doctor when you are supposed to.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse about all new medications.** For each, ask why you need it and how to take it.
- **Ask questions if you don't understand something.** If you're not sure what your doctor or nurse is asking you to do or why, ask to have it explained again.
- **Schedule a follow-up appointment (if necessary) before you leave the doctor's office.** Don't wait until you get home, since you might forget.

**Remember, you and your doctor are a team. Working closely with your doctor—asking questions, listening carefully and following his or her advice—is good for your health.**

### Where to Learn More about Preparing for your Doctor's Appointment

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
[www.ahrq.gov/qual/beprepared.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/beprepared.htm)

National Patient Safety Foundation  
[www.npsf.org/pdf/paf/WhatYouCanDo/pdf](http://www.npsf.org/pdf/paf/WhatYouCanDo/pdf)

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