

## Preparing for a Doctor Appointment

Whether you go to the doctor regularly or are having your first appointment in years, make sure to have a plan to make the most of your visit. Use the following tips to take a more active role in your health.

### Make a List

Make sure that you address important issues with your doctor by creating a list ahead of time. If you are concerned about any symptoms, be honest and write down everything you are experiencing, including frequency and severity.

Write questions down in order of importance so that you are sure to address the critical ones right away.

Note any changes that have occurred since your last appointment, including:

- changes in weight, appetite and energy
- any emergency room visits
- medication reactions
- specialty doctor visits.

Additionally, make sure to ask if you are due for any routine screenings.

### Bring Your Information

The doctor's office requires some basic and not-so-basic information on your visit. Be sure to bring the following:

- Insurance card(s)
- Previous doctors' or other specialists' names and contact information
- Prescription and over-the-counter medication names and doses (some doctors recommend bringing the physical medications in with you to the appointment)
- Medical records, if this is your first visit or if you were seen at a different office since your last appointment

### Make Necessary Arrangements for Interpreters

Plan ahead if you know that the doctor you were referred to or selected does not speak your language. Even if the doctor knows a little of your language, it may bring more comfort to bring an interpreter or a trusted friend who can speak both languages. Be wary of using children; some health topics might be sensitive and require explanation.

For help finding an interpreter, call the doctor's office to see if they are able to provide one for you. There may be members of the staff who can assist with interpretation during your appointment. If the doctor is unable to provide an interpreter, contact your local community or neighborhood association for assistance in finding a person to translate for you.

It may be worthwhile for you to meet with your interpreter prior to the appointment in order to identify what topics you would like discussed during the appointment.

## Ask Questions

Sometimes, medical terms can come in the way of understanding the diagnosis, symptoms and treatment. Do not be shy if you require clarity and make sure to ask questions.

Here are some basic questions you can use as a guide in your next appointment.

### **For a new prescription:**

- What is the name of the medication?
- What does this medication treat?
- Are there any generic forms available?
- What are the directions for taking this medication?
- For how long should I take the medication and when should I stop?
- Are there any side effects?
- When can I get a refill?
- Can I take vitamins with this prescription?
- Is there any food and drink I need to avoid while on this medication?
- Are there any other precautions I should take while on this medication?
- What should I do if I experience an adverse side effect?
- Do I need to stop taking any other medications?

### **For a new diagnosis:**

- What is my diagnosis?
- What is the prognosis?
- What life changes will I need to make?
- What are my treatment options?
- What are the benefits and risks of each treatment?
- What organizations and resources do you recommend for support and information?
- Will I need special help at home for my condition?
- Do my family members have an increased risk for this disease as well?

### **For a surgery recommendation:**

- Why do I need surgery?
- What kind of surgery do I need?
- What are the risks and benefits of this surgery?
- How successful is this surgery?

- Have you performed this surgery before?
- Will this surgery hurt and will I require anesthesia?
- How long will recovery take?
- How much will the surgery cost and will my insurance cover it?
- Is there another option?
- Can I get a second opinion?

Each situation will be different, so these questions are only meant as a guide. Make sure you leave your appointment with a clear understanding of your health and the options available to you.

## Resources

- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: <http://archive.ahrq.gov/qual/beprepared.htm>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- National Institute on Aging: [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

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