

Fact sheet

Make the most of your visit to your doctor or health provider

Visiting a doctor or other health provider can be stressful. Appointments are often short so it's important to be prepared and plan ahead to get the most out of your visit.

Before your appointment

You may find it helpful to prepare for your appointment by following these simple tips:

- > Write a list of questions to ask so you don't forget anything. Rank your questions in order of importance, including symptoms, changes and any concerns you may have.
- > Write a list of all medications you are taking – both prescribed 'over the counter' and herbal remedies -including the name of the drug and the dose you are taking. If possible, take the container, bottle or packet the medication originally came in.
- > If you are visiting the doctor or health professional for the first time, write a list of your past major medical issues and any surgery you have had to take along. Also write a list of your allergies and your family medical history, for example if a parent has had a disease or genetic condition. Information on recent test results or x rays may also be helpful
- > Think about taking a family member, friend or loved one to your appointment. You may find it helpful to have another person there to ask questions, write down answers and to help remember important information.
- > Make sure you take a note pad and pen with you to take notes so you don't have to rely on your memory.

At your appointment

- > At the start of the appointment, tell your doctor or health professional that you have some questions to ask so time is allowed for these to be answered.
- > Write down the answers to your questions or ask the doctor or health professional to write down the information. Ask if there is any written information to help you better understand your condition.
- > Tell your doctor or health professional if you are using or receiving any other treatments - medicinal, vitamins, herbal remedies or alternative therapies.
- > By the end of the appointment, make sure you have a clear idea of your condition or problem and the treatment. If you are still unsure ask the doctor to go through the most important points again.

Questions or requests you might have for your doctor or health professional include the following:

- > Please explain what my condition/problem is in clear and simple language.
- > How serious is the condition/problem?
- > What is the cause of this condition/problem?
- > Will I need treatment? If so, what type of treatment is required - test, surgery, medication or procedure?
- > Why do I need this specific treatment, and do I have any choices of treatment options?
- > How and when do I take medication?
- > How do I store this medication?



- > What sort of tests will I need, if any, to diagnose the condition/problem?
- > How accurate are the tests for diagnosing the condition/problem?
- > ?
- > What are the risks and benefits to this type of treatment?
- > Does this treatment cause any side effects or long-term changes - physical, social, emotional, mental or sexual?
- > Are there any activities that I can not do with this condition/problem?
- > Are there any activities that I can not do while having this treatment or taking this medication?
- > Will this medication interfere with other medications I am taking?
- > Will I need a follow up appointment? If so, when will I need another appointment?

After your appointment

- > Make sure you call your doctor or health professional to find out results of tests. Don't expect the doctor or health professional to phone you.
- > In light of your results, ask your doctor or health professional for more information on your condition/problem and ask where you can find accurate, reliable information.
- > Contact your doctor or health professional if the condition/problem becomes worse or does not seem to be getting better.
- > You may want to get a second opinion about what is wrong with you. This is quite common and you will not be hurting your doctor's or health professional's feelings. Some doctors and health professionals will suggest you visit another doctor or health professional for a second opinion. It is important that you have confidence and trust in your doctor or health professional so go ahead and look around for someone with whom you are comfortable. Different doctors and health professionals suit different people
- > You may like to seek alternative and complimentary therapies to treat your condition/problem. Make sure you tell your doctor or health professional so they can advise you if the therapy is suitable or appropriate for your condition/problem.
- > If you have been diagnosed with a serious illness or condition, consider asking your doctor or health professional what support or counselling services are available. Your family members and loved ones may also be interested in receiving counselling.

While doctors and health professionals can assist you with diagnosing, treating and managing your condition/problem, you have the right to make all decisions about your health. To do this, you need all the relevant information about your condition/problem and treatments so you can decide how you want to manage your health.

For more information

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