

Tips for Communicating with Your Doctor

Your relationship with your doctor is an important one. The following tips may help you make the most of your time with your doctor.

- Get organized before your doctor's appointment. Be prepared to answer questions about your specific symptoms, how long you have had the symptoms and what (if anything) you have done to try to alleviate the symptoms. Bring along a list of medications you take (both prescription and over-the-counter). It might help, too, to list surgeries and major illnesses you've had throughout your life. You will be asked about your lifestyle, habits, and family history. It is important to be honest when answering these questions. Your doctor can only make an accurate diagnosis if he or she has complete and accurate information.
- Think about the questions you want to ask, and make a list ahead of time. It is often difficult to remember all of the questions you have when you get into a conversation with your doctor. Leave room on your list to write in the answers and check them off as you proceed. Take notes so you remember the details once you leave the office.
- You may also want to bring a family member or friend with you. This person can serve as an extra pair of ears for you and fill in any missing details later that you may miss during the appointment.
- If your doctor wants diagnostic testing to be done, make sure that he or she clearly explains the tests. You should understand why the test is being done, what the test will tell your doctor and what risks may be associated with the test.
- If your doctor explains your condition or answers your questions using terms you do not understand, be sure to ask him or her to clarify. It is important that you fully understand the situation so that you can accurately follow the doctor's instructions. Repeat back to the doctor what you think you heard to be sure that your notes are accurate and complete and that you fully understand what has been said.
- Ask your doctor for any written materials that are available regarding your condition. These materials may provide additional information to help you better understand your condition.
- Once you have explored your treatment options with your doctor and have agreed upon a plan, comply with that plan. If you feel the treatment plan is not working, let your doctor know as soon as you can. Don't just stop the treatment without consulting your doctor and don't assume that you are bothering your doctor with your concerns.
- If part of your treatment includes prescriptions, be sure you understand them before you leave the doctor's office. Specifically, you should know the name of the medication, when it should be taken, how much to take at one time and any precautions and/or recommendations associated with the medication.
- Being prepared BEFORE you visit the doctor can make the appointment go much more smoothly and keep you better informed about your overall health.