

Wellness Articles

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Making the most of your Doctor's Appointment

Working closely with your doctor is one of the most important things you can do to help you get – and stay – as healthy as you can.

Have you ever caught yourself saying the following things ...

- “Doctors are so busy. I don't want to bother them.”
- “The doctor's the expert, not me. I just listen.”
- “I'm afraid of saying something that isn't right.”
- “I'm actually a little scared of my doctor. He intimidates me.”

Partnering with your doctor shouldn't have to be a struggle. Doctors are experts on medical care but you are the expert on yourself. And, together, you can find a solution that best fits your values, beliefs, and lifestyle.

Things to do before visiting your doctor

- Be prepared. Write down what you want to say, how you feel, and any symptoms you are having.
- You can also write down the three most important questions you have; what means the most to you.
- Don't be afraid to say what you think.
- Bring someone with you, especially if you have trouble remembering or would like some support
- Always asks questions to ensure you understand. Some examples of questions you can ask when talking with your doctor about treatments and tests are:
 - What is the name of the test, medicine, surgery, or other treatment?
 - Why is it needed?
 - What are the risks?
 - What are potential side effects?
 - Are there alternatives?
 - How much does it cost?
 - What will happen if I decide not to have treatment?
 - How do I prepare for each test or treatment?
 - Is the cost of the medicine covered by my provincial health plan or private health insurance?

- How do I take this medicine?
- How will this medicine react with other medicines I am taking?

After your doctor visit

It's a good idea to make notes following your Doctor's visit. Those can include:

- What your health professional thinks the problem might be.
- What you might expect to happen next.
- What you can do to manage your problem at home.

Follow the instructions your doctor gave you, including filling a prescription, scheduling tests, or making another appointment. Call your doctor if you still have questions or if there is anything you do not understand.

Watch closely for changes in your health and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems or symptoms that concern you. Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.

Update the medical records that you keep at home, including new test results and medicine changes.

How can you partner with your doctor?

Here are some tips for being a good partner with your doctor:

- Build a relationship with your doctor – Let your doctor know that you want to be a partner in your health care. Tell the doctor what your expectations are.
- Be an active participant in each appointment – Listen carefully to what your doctor says. If you do not understand a diagnosis or treatment, ask questions. And tell the doctor if you think that following the prescribed treatment will be hard for you.
- Have a family member or friend with you during your appointment, if possible – He or she can take notes, ask questions to clarify information, and help you remember what your doctor says.
- Bring your medicines to your appointment – If you take prescription or over-the-counter medicines, including natural health products, bring all of them with you to any appointment with a doctor. If you cannot bring the medicines, bring a list of the medicines that you take.
- Ask for instructions – Before you leave the doctor's office, make sure you know what you are supposed to do to care for yourself. Ask for written information, links to videos and websites, and any other instructions.
- Be sure to make and go to all appointments -- Call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

- Prepare your child for tests and examinations – Let your child know why he or she is seeing a doctor and what will be done during the visit. Your child's age and developmental level will determine how best to prepare him or her. And ask your older child if he or she would like to speak to the doctor alone. Teens may be more willing to talk about topics such as sexuality, mental health, and drugs or alcohol if they know they can have time on their own with their doctors.

A strong partnership between you and your doctor is key to getting great care. A primary care physician such as a family doctor should know your medical history and understand what is important to you. They may be the resource you need most when you face a major health care decision.