

Communicating with Your Doctor



Making the most out of the time you spend with your doctor, whether you are sick or well, is important. Good communication helps your doctor understand your health concerns, which can lead to a quick and proper diagnosis. Knowing what specific information to give your doctor and what questions to ask allows you to be an active and informed participant in your health care.

What to Tell Your Doctor

Most doctors have a limited amount of time to spend with each patient, often 15 minutes or less. Being prepared for your appointment ensures you make the best use of this time. Be ready to:

- Describe your health concerns and symptoms.
- Explain when your symptoms began, how often you experience them and anything that relieves them.
- Give a complete health history.
- Tell your doctor about any prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, or herbal products you are taking.
- Discuss any allergies you have.
- Let your doctor know of any lifestyle changes you have recently made.
- Tell your doctor about any personal issues you may be experiencing.

If your current health concern seems like something you have experienced before, tell your doctor what treatment you received and how effective it was in relieving the symptoms.

What to Ask Your Doctor

Once your doctor makes a diagnosis, it's important to ask questions to completely understand the information given to you. The following are basic questions to ask, which will encourage dialogue with your doctor:

- What is the diagnosis?
- What does this diagnosis mean?
- What are the treatment options?
- What are the benefits and/or risks of each treatment option?
- Is a follow-up appointment needed?
- If medication is prescribed, what will the medication do and what are the side effects?
- If a test or procedure is ordered, what can be expected?
- What else can I do to improve my health or remain healthy?

You may also want to take notes or ask for additional written information to take home and read at your leisure. Ask for clarification if you don't understand any information given to you. Don't be afraid to seek a second opinion if you feel uncertain about the information or diagnosis you received.



Being prepared for your appointment ensures you make the best use of your doctor's time.