

Tips for Communicating Effectively with Your Doctor

Homework:

1. Create a list of medications and supplements. Update every time a change is made.
2. Create a list of drug and food allergies. Update as necessary.
3. Create a personal medical history. Update at least once a year or when a change occurs. If it is long, consider creating a one-page summary.
4. Create a family medical history. Update as necessary.
5. Create an advance directive. Be sure your doctors have a copy. Also upload a copy to the patient portals.
6. Assign a medical proxy. Be sure your doctor knows who this person is and has their contact information.
7. Learn to use the patient portals for your doctors. This is the quickest and most direct way to access and track test results, diagnoses, treatment plans, and appointment summaries.
8. Keep a list of symptoms and concerns. Include any time you take your own vital signs like blood pressure, pulse, or blood glucose.

General Behavior:

1. Be assertive. Nothing is more important than your health. If your concerns are not addressed to your satisfaction, let your doctor know that you still have questions and ask if an additional appointment can be set up, whether the appointment can be extended or if there are other staff members who can address your questions immediately.
2. Balance assertiveness with friendliness, respect, and understanding. Speak and act with respect. You may be feeling quite ill, frustrated, and tired, but try to treat the doctor (and others in the healthcare system) with patience and respect.

Remember that the healthcare workers around you are there to help you. Give them that opportunity and thank them when they do.

3. Be honest and accurate with your doctor about your pain and lifestyle (alcohol use, drug use, sleep patterns, toileting patterns, etc.).
4. Tell the story: instead of saying, “my chest hurts,” tell the doctor when the pain started, if it’s been painful before, what you were doing when you first felt it, how it felt, how often you feel the pain, if anything you do makes the level or type of pain change.
5. Remember that nurses and pharmacists are also good sources of information.

Preparing for an Appointment with Your Doctor:

1. Bring a copy of your list of medications and supplements.
2. Bring a copy of your list of drug allergies.
3. Bring a copy of your personal medical history.
4. Bring a copy of your family medical history.
5. Bring your insurance card, ID card (such as drivers' license), and a method of payment.
6. Some doctors' offices have longer appointment times, if necessary. If you think you will have a need for an extended appointment with many questions, let the scheduler know ahead of time.
7. Bring your list of symptoms, concerns, or questions that you want to discuss at this appointment. Try to keep the list focused on three or fewer items. If you have more, consider a follow-up visit. Prioritize items based on how severely they affect your overall health. Consider sending the list to your doctor ahead of time or making a second copy of the list to give the doctor in the office.

When making notes on what to discuss with your doctor, consider the topics and note any changes that have occurred, when, and how they affect you.

<u>Your Physical Health</u> Recent hospitalizations or emergencies Bone/Joint pain or stiffness Bowel/Bladder problems Chest pain/Shortness of breath Headaches/Feeling dizzy or lightheaded Vision/Hearing changes Skin changes	<u>Everyday Living</u> Accidents, injuries, or falls Daily activities Exercise Problems with intimacy or sexual activity Driving/Transportation/Mobility Living situation
<u>Your Thoughts and Feelings</u> Feeling lonely or isolated Feeling sad, down, or blue Problems with memory or thinking Problems with sleep or changes in sleep patterns	<u>Your Mental Health, and Lifestyle</u> Alcohol use Weight changes Diet/Appetite changes Tobacco use

During the Appointment:

1. Be honest about your behaviors and how you feel. Do not minimize symptoms or situations; do not exaggerate, either.
2. Let your doctor know if you have a living will or any specific beliefs that may affect your treatment choices or preferences.
3. If you have had tests or appointments with other doctors that may affect your treatment with this doctor, be sure that this doctor has received those results or be prepared to share them at your appointment.
4. Speak up for yourself or bring someone who will. If you have concerns regarding treatments, procedures, medications, etc., speak up. Your doctor may be able to address your specific concerns immediately.
5. Listen and take notes (or bring someone who can). If the doctor speaks too quickly, ask them to repeat what they said or to slow down.
6. Once your doctor explains something, repeat it back in your own words to be sure you understood correctly. Ask for corrections on anything you did not understand correctly. If you still don't understand something, ask if the doctor can draw a picture of it for you. Sometimes an illustration can make things clearer.
7. Ask questions. Did the doctor use a word you don't understand? Ask for a definition. Do you want to know side effects of possible treatments? Ask! Don't understand what a test result means? Ask for an explanation! If your questions are not be adequately answered or you feel you are being rushed, ask if someone else in the office can spend more time answering your questions before you leave.
8. At the end of the appointment, ask the doctor to summarize the appointment. What were the findings and conclusions? What medications were added, removed, or changed? What is the next step and when will you follow up? Ask for this summary verbally and in writing.
9. Before you leave the office, find out who to contact if you have questions after you get home. Often the doctor can be reached by phone or through a patient portal email. Ask for the doctor's or health care provider's contact information and their preferred method of communication.

Templates:

Allergy vs Intolerance (sensitivity) - both are unwanted reactions to

Allergy – involves an immune system reaction; symptoms often include hives, rash, itching, facial/tongue swelling, throat swelling, rapid heart rate, and shortness of breath

Intolerance – involves no immune system response; symptoms may include gas, bloating, nausea, vomiting, confusion, hallucinations, dizziness, abdominal pain or cramping, cough, dry mouth, constipation, or diarrhea

DRUG and FOOD ALLERGIES	
Drug / Food	Reaction

DRUG and FOOD INTOLERANCES	
Drug / Food	Reaction

CURRENT MEDICATIONS						
Medication	Description	Start Date	Reason	Dose	Time	Side Effects

CURRENT SUPPLEMENTS					
Supplement	Description	Start Date	Reason	Dose	Time

HEALTH TRACKING SHEET		
Symptom (BP, pulse, blood sugar)	Date / Time	Notes / Solutions Tried

PROVIDER LIST			
Provider Name / Web Address	Specialty / Patient Portal	Address	Phone / Fax / Email

FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY				
	Parents	Grandparents	Aunt/Uncles	Siblings
Acid reflux				
Alcohol addiction				
Anemia				
Anxiety				
Artery / vein problems				
Arthritis				
Asthma				
Autoimmune disease				
Bipolar disorder				
Bladder problems				
Bleeding disorders				
Blood clots				
Cancer (what type)				
Cataracts				
Colitis				
Diabetes				
Depression				
Drug addiction				
Gallstones				
Glaucoma				
Gout				
Headaches				
Hearing impairment				
Heart attack				
Heart disease				
Heart valve problems				
Hepatitis				
Hernia				
High blood pressure				
High cholesterol				
Kidney disease				
Liver disease				
Lung disease				
Mental illness				
Migraines				
Osteoporosis				
Recurrent infections				
Seizures				
Skin infections				
Sleep apnea				
Stroke				
Swallowing disorders				
Thyroid disease				

FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY				
	Parents	Grandparents	Aunt/Uncles	Siblings
Ulcers				
UTIs				
Vision impairment				
Other hospitalizations				
Other signification medical issues				
Major injuries				
Major surgeries				
Age and cause of death, if applicable				

Resources:

<https://www.wmhs.com/patient-guide-10-ways-improve-communication-doctor/>

<https://www.ucsfhealth.org/education/communicating-with-your-doctor>

<https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/talking-your-doctor>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/dont-be-shy-4-tips-for-talking-to-your-doctor>