

Communicating with your Healthcare Team

Talk With Your Doctor

How well you and your healthcare provider talk to each other is an important part of your healthcare. This means asking questions if the doctor's explanations or instructions are unclear, bringing up problems even if your doctor doesn't ask, and letting your doctor know if you have concerns about a treatment or change in your daily life. Taking an active role in your healthcare will help you feel more in control.

Get Ready for Your Appointment

It's helpful to arrive at your doctor's visit with a basic plan that you've thought about beforehand. Here are some tips to help:

- **Write down your questions and comments.** Put them in order so you're sure to ask about the most important ones first.
- **Take along a list of all the medications you are taking.** Include any over-the-counter medicines, vitamins or supplements. You should also take your insurance cards, names, and phone numbers of other doctors you see. Bring your medical records if your doctor doesn't already have them.
- **Ask a family member or friend to come with you.** Your companion can remind you what you planned to discuss with the doctor if you forget, and can help you remember what the doctor said.
- **Find an interpreter if you need one.** You can ask a friend or family member who speaks English to come with you. Or you can contact the doctor's office ahead of time to see if one can be provided for you.



Share Information

- **Update your doctor.** Tell your doctor what has happened since your last visit. Let your doctor know about any new symptoms or changes in your appetite, weight, sleep, or in the medications you take.
- **Describe any symptoms.** A symptom is something you feel like pain or dizziness. Information about your symptoms along with findings from a physical exam and medical tests will help the doctor make a diagnosis.
- **Stick to the point.** Each patient is given a limited amount of time during an appointment. To make the best use of your time, keep to the subject. For instance, give the doctor a brief description of the symptom, when it started, how often it happens, and if it is getting worse or better.
- **Take notes.** Or get a friend or family member to take notes for you.
- **Ask your doctor to write down instructions for you.** Ask for printed materials about your condition or suggestions for where you can get more information.

Ask Questions

You and your healthcare provider will need to work together to make treatment choices that are best for you. Here are some questions to help you begin a discussion.

Ask questions about prevention

- How can I help to prevent a condition that runs in my family before it affects me?
- How can I keep my condition from getting worse?
- What changes or symptoms do I need to watch for and tell you about?

- I've heard that people with kidney disease have a high risk of heart disease, what can I do to help slow or even prevent heart disease?

Ask questions about different treatments

- Are there any risks associated with my treatment?
- How soon should treatment start?
- How long will treatment last?
- What other treatments are available?
- How much will the treatment cost? How much will my insurance cover?

Ask questions about medicine

- How often should I take my medicine? At what times of day?
- Should I take it before, with, or after meals? Should I avoid any foods, medicines or alcoholic beverages when I take it?
- Are there times when I should change the dose of medicine I take?
- What should I do if I forget to take it?
- What side effects can this medicine cause? What should I do if I have side effects?
- If I'm sick and I can't keep food down, should I still take this medicine?