

## Health and Human Sciences

### AGING WELL

*One in a series that focuses on improving outcomes for seniors and their families.*

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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# How to Talk to Your Healthcare Provider

*Kristen Kirby, Janelle Potetz, Becky Walters, Stephanie Woodcox*

**The healthcare world can be confusing, especially when visiting a provider, such as a doctor or nurse. It is important that you feel comfortable going to your provider and getting all the information you need.**

Sometimes patients do not ask questions during their visit. They may feel embarrassed, or don't want the doctor to think they are stupid. It is much better — for patients and providers — when patients ask questions. Discuss anything that you think might affect your health. Healthcare providers make the best decisions possible based, in part, on the information that you provide.

If a patient doesn't understand the information given, bad outcomes are possible. Perhaps medication is not taken, or taken improperly, leading to a hospitalization. Maybe an appointment isn't kept because the patient didn't know about it or understand its importance. Or available preventive services — shots, screening tests, etc. — aren't used, even when available and covered by insurance.

#### BEFORE YOUR OFFICE VISIT

- Write down any questions you want to ask.
- Bring an updated list of all medications you take or the actual bottles of medications (prescribed, herbal, and over-the-counter).
- Bring your blood pressure numbers and/or your blood sugar numbers you have recorded since your last visit.
- Bring your insurance card(s).
- Consider bringing a trusted family member or friend.

## DURING YOUR VISIT

**Remember:** *This visit is all about you! You know your body better than anyone else, so speak up and ask questions, especially if you are unsure about what is being discussed.*

- Ask everyone to speak in basic terms if you do not understand something being said.
- Ask for information in writing.
- If information is given to you but you cannot read it due to small print or the medical language, ask the nurse to update and reprint.
- Offer to “teach back” or restate what the doctor or nurse told you to ensure that you understand the information correctly.

## AFTER THE VISIT

It happens to everyone at some point – you leave the office and forget the details of what was said in the office. If you find yourself with questions at this point:

- Call the office and talk with the nurse for clarification of the visit.
- You can talk with a pharmacist about any medication questions, such as how medicines could interact, or what time of day they should be taken.
- Be sure to continue any home monitoring and recording that has been asked of you (for example, taking your own blood pressure or blood sugar and writing down the results).

## REFERENCES

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