

QuickTips

For Improving Your Health Care Experience

TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

One way to get high-quality health care is to find and use information that will help you take an active role in all decisions made about your care. These quick tips will help you when talking with your doctor. Research has shown that patients who have good relationships with their doctors tend to be more satisfied with their care—and have better results.

Here are some tips to help you and your doctor become partners in improving your health care:

- ➔ **Give information.** Don't wait to be asked!
- ➔ **You know important things about your symptoms and your health history.** Tell your doctor what you think he or she needs to know.
- ➔ **It is important to tell your doctor personal information—even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.**
- ➔ **Bring a “health history” list with you, and keep it up to date.** You might want to make a copy of the form for each member of your family.
- ➔ **Always bring any medicines you are taking, or a list of those medicines (include when and how often you take them) and what strength.** Talk about any allergies or reactions you have had to your medicines.
- ➔ **Tell your doctor about any herbal products you use or alternative medicines or treatments you receive.**
- ➔ **Bring other medical information, such as x-ray films, test results, and medical records.** Get information.
- ➔ **Ask questions.** If you don't, your doctor may think you understand everything that was said.

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- ➔ **Write down your questions before your visit.** List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.
- ➔ **You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions.** This person can also help you understand and/or remember the answers.
- ➔ **Ask your doctor to draw pictures if that might help to explain something.**
- ➔ **Take notes.**
- ➔ **Some doctors do not mind if you bring a tape recorder to help you remember things.** But always ask first.
- ➔ **Let your doctor know if you need more time.** If there is not time that day, perhaps you can speak to a nurse or physician assistant on staff. Or, ask if you can call later to speak with someone.
- ➔ **Ask if your doctor has washed his or her hands before starting to examine you.** Research shows that hand-washing can prevent the spread of infections.
- ➔ **Take information home.**
- ➔ **Ask for written instructions.**
- ➔ **Your doctor also may have brochures and audio tapes and videotapes that can help you.** If not, ask how you can get such materials. Once you leave the doctor's office, follow up.
- ➔ **If you have questions, call.**
- ➔ **If your symptoms get worse, or if you have problems with your medicine, call.**
- ➔ **If you had tests and do not hear from your doctor, call for your test results.**
- ➔ **If your doctor said you need to have certain tests, make appointments at the lab or other offices to get them done.**
- ➔ **If your doctor said you should see a specialist, make an appointment.**

Remember, quality matters, especially when it comes to your health. 

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, www.ahrq.gov

The information contained in this medical self-care newsletter can be used to increase your personal awareness of how to manage minor health issues. If you have any questions or concerns about medical issues impacting you or your family, always contact your health care provider.

