



At the Doctor's Office

Ask-the-doctor Checklist

Use this checklist to help you prepare for any doctor visit.

Before the Visit

- ✓ Prepare a list of any medications you are currently taking.
- ✓ Make a list of your symptoms and concerns. If you have seen a different doctor previously for a similar problem, be sure to mention that, and arrange for a copy of your medical records to be sent to your current physician.

During the Visit

- ✓ State your problem or concerns first.
- ✓ Describe your symptoms.
- ✓ Describe any past experience or treatment for the same problem.

If the doctor prescribes medication during the visit, ask the following:

- ✓ What is the name of this medication?
- ✓ Can a generic medication be substituted?
- ✓ What is the purpose of this medication?
- ✓ How should I take this medication?
- ✓ Are there any potential side effects?

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Making the Most of Your Doctor Visit

If you have a health concern, or just need a checkup, visiting your doctor's office will usually be your first course of action. But what if you don't have a regular doctor or your health plan has changed and you need to find a new doctor? And, once you've found the right one, how do you make the most out of your visit? With a little research and some simple planning, you can find the best doctor and ensure you get the care you need.

The average doctor visit lasts only 15 to 20 minutes, and during that short time, a great deal of information is shared between the doctor and patient. Without adequate preparation, you may not remember every aspect of the discussion you had with your doctor. After the appointment, you may think of things you wish you had asked, but did not.

Preparation is the key to any successful doctor visit. While your time with your doctor may be limited, proper planning will help ensure that you both get the information you need.

- ✓ Make a list of the questions, symptoms and concerns that you want to discuss. Use this as a checklist during your visit to make sure you cover everything.
- ✓ Ask your doctor questions if you do not understand something. You deserve to understand all the information you are given about your condition and treatment(s). Do not leave until you understand everything you have been told.
- ✓ Know your symptoms, and explain them clearly. Your doctor needs accurate, factual information in order to make a correct diagnosis. Share your medical history, including any allergies, and inform your doctor if you may be pregnant, plan to become pregnant or are breast-feeding.
- ✓ Be open and honest. Some symptoms can be embarrassing, but your doctor must be aware of everything in order to prescribe the best course of treatment for you.
- ✓ Find a doctor with whom you are comfortable. This will make it easier for you to have open discussions, and ultimately you will receive better care. ♦

Selecting a Physician

Selecting a physician is a very personal decision, and the factors that go into making that decision are often as different as the individuals involved. Some people have strong preferences for doctors of certain ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds, while others are interested in doctors who are familiar with alternative treatments like acupuncture or herbal remedies. Whatever you prefer, consider the following when you are looking for a new physician.

Type of Doctor

Primary care physicians typically fall into one of four specialties: pediatrics, obstetrics, family practice and internal medicine. Pediatricians are trained to care for children, and obstetricians provide primary care for women during pregnancy (and sometimes throughout the childbearing years). Family practitioners take care of people of all ages and have experience in a wide range of areas. Physicians who specialize in internal medicine treat only adults and often have expertise in the treatment of certain conditions.

Education and Training

Knowing where a physician went to medical school or where he or she trained (residency) can be helpful if you are familiar with the reputations of certain medical schools or other teaching institutions.

Keep a Personal Medical Record

If you are ill or injured and require emergency care, doctors, nurses or paramedics will have many questions about your medical history. Even if you think you know all the answers at the best of times, the most organized patient might not be able to remember all the details of his or her health history in the event of an emergency.

It's important to keep a comprehensive health record nearby. In many cases, this information can help a medical professional make better decisions for your care during an emergency, or whenever you have a need for medical care.

Your personal medical record should include any allergies, medications you take, recent illnesses or medical conditions, a history of your immunizations, and any hospitalizations and surgeries. Why not gather this information together today? You never know when you may need it. ◇

Board Certification

A board-certified doctor has received additional training after medical school and has passed examinations demonstrating expertise in his or her respective field.

Special Interests

Primary care doctors often develop expertise in a specific field or condition, such as diabetes or geriatrics. It is often worthwhile to find out if a prospective physician has a special interest that matches your needs.

Office Location

If you need to make frequent trips to your doctor's office, it is always helpful if the location is close to your home or work.

Personal Recommendations

Recommendations from family members and friends are often one of the best ways to find out if a physician will meet your needs.

Websites

Many health care organizations post the names and backgrounds of participating physicians on their websites. Check with your employer's human resources department or your health plan provider to find out which doctors are in your network. You can then visit the websites of clinics or facilities that interest you.

Once you have narrowed down your list of potential doctors, schedule an in-person appointment to get to know your final candidates. Most physicians are happy to meet with a potential patient. ◇

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Ask-the-doctor Checklist

- ✓ Are there any other medications (prescription OR over-the-counter) that I should avoid while taking this medication?
- ✓ Should I avoid any specific food or beverage while taking this medication?
- ✓ How long should I take this medication?

For any prescribed drug, test or treatment, ask the following questions:

- ✓ What is its name?
- ✓ Why is it needed?
- ✓ What are the risks involved?
- ✓ Are there alternatives?
- ✓ What if I do nothing?

At the end of your visit, ask the following:

- ✓ Should I return for a follow-up visit? When?
- ✓ How will I obtain my test results?
- ✓ Should I watch for specific problems or side effects?
- ✓ Is there anything else I need to know?

After the Visit

Keep a written record of your doctor's diagnosis, your next steps, prescribed treatments and home care techniques. ◇

