

## **A Visit to Your Doctor: Making the Most of the Time**

“When did he say I should go back to see him?” “I forgot to tell her about the medicine I take at bedtime.” “I really should have told him about ....”

Is this a common scenario for you? You return from a visit to your physician, only to remember later numerous things you should have asked about, or perhaps you don't remember exactly some of the instructions.

Here are some tips to help you make the most of your next visit to your healthcare practitioner:

**Do your homework.** Whether this is a special visit to discuss a new health issue or a follow-up visit for which you've seen your physician before, put your thoughts down on paper in advance. If there are new symptoms, list them. Be able to describe when and where they occur, how they feel, and what has worked or not worked to relieve them. Be prepared to tell about recent lab tests, and any consultations with other health professionals.

Bring along the bottles of *all* the medications you are taking, including prescriptions, over-the-counters, and herbals. Then the physician can see exactly what they are, their dosages, and when you are taking them. If taking the containers along isn't feasible, be prepared with a list to show the doctor. And don't forget to inform him of medications that other physicians have prescribed for you. Jot down any questions you have.

**Bring your papers with you.** Take all your notes along; be prepared to leave them with the doctor if asked. Tuck a pad of paper and pen in your pocket for jotting down answers to your questions. Don't leave your insurance card home; the receptionist may ask for it, even if you have been there before.

**Don't go it alone.** Companionship might be just the ticket for the visit. Having a family member or friend along gives moral support, provides another set of ears, reminds you of questions you have forgotten, and helps keep information in perspective for you if you're feeling particularly stressed. If you're uncomfortable having another person around for parts of the visit, the companion can wait in the reception area.

**Don't be shy.** Sometimes we feel embarrassed mentioning certain things to the doctor. Don't be -- there is probably nothing your physician hasn't heard or seen before. After all, that is his or her job -- to deal with body functions. Your physician needs all the information possible to give you the care you need.

**Ask questions.** If the physician says something you don't understand, ask for clarification. The same information reworded might make more sense to you. Brochures describing disease conditions or diagnostic tests may be available to take home. Have the physician write medical terminology down on your note pad so you can research it further on the computer or at the library.

**Pick up the phone afterwards.** Still have questions after you get home? Call the physician or his nurse. They may not be available immediately, so leave a message about when and where you can be reached, and the nature of your question.

**For more tips on how to talk to your doctor, check out these resources:**

- [www.aarp.org/health/staying\\_healthy/prevention/a2003-03-13-talkdr.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/staying_healthy/prevention/a2003-03-13-talkdr.html): AARP offers more detailed information about talking with your doctor in the "Checkups and Prevention" section of its web site.
- [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.pdf](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.pdf): The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) offers information and publications on a wide variety of topics, including how to talk with your doctor.

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