

# How to Prepare for Your Doctor's Visit

You may be seeing your doctor for a checkup or for a new problem you have been having. How can you make the most of the short time you may have with your doctor? One way is to come prepared.

## Before you visit your doctor, start a list:

- Write down the questions you have. Bring a pen and paper so you can take notes.
  - Write down your symptoms if you are not feeling well.
  - Write down any big changes that have happened since you last saw your doctor. This might mean a new job or home, a death in the family, a divorce, etc.
  - Add a note to ask your doctor about any screenings or tests you should have.
  - List all of the drugs you take, including any vitamins or herbs.
  - Bring copies of your complete medical history.
  - Bring results of tests that you may have taken recently.
- Ask your most important questions first. You might feel like you need more time to talk. You might say to your doctor, "I know we don't have time today to talk more. Can we set up a half-hour appointment to talk about this later?" Many doctors are open to having e-mails sent or to take phone calls.
  - Ask your doctor to repeat something you don't understand. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor to speak slower or to spell words out for you.
  - Your doctor might be able to draw a picture or use a model to help you. Repeat back what your doctor says.
  - Ask your doctor for printed materials that you can take to read. Ask about other resources that you can go to to get good information.
  - You might feel shy about asking questions. Think about bringing a friend or family member who is good at speaking up to your office visit.

## Speak up.

You may not understand the words your doctor is using. You need to leave the office understanding your health status and knowing what your next step should be. Here are some ways you can help make this happen:

## To make your office visit go smoothly:

- Get there early enough to fill out forms.
- Have your insurance card ready.
- Bring your medical records or have them sent before your visit if this is a new doctor.

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## Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Below is a list of questions from AARP. Make this list your own. As questions come to you, add them.

### Problem

- What is wrong with me? How do you know?
- What caused this problem?

### Tests

- Must I have tests?
- What tests do I need and why?
- What do the tests involve?
- How do I prepare for the tests?
- When will I know the test results?
- Will my insurance cover the cost of the tests?
- Will I have to take these tests again?

### Treatment

- What are my treatment choices?
- What are the benefits of the treatment?  
What are the risks? What are the side effects?
- Which treatment is the most common for my condition?

### Drugs

- What kind of drug(s) must I take? For how long?
- What does the drug do? Will there be any side effects?
- What should I do if I have side effects/  
Can I take a generic version of the drug?
- Will the drug interact with any I am already taking?
- Should I avoid any kind of food or activity while taking this drug?

### Follow-up

- Do I need to see a specialist?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- Do I need a follow-up visit?

### Other Questions

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