

Getting the Most from Your Appointment

Good communication with your Physician or Nurse Practitioner (also known as Primary Care Provider) is critical to your health and effective appointments are crucial to delivering that care. To help you get the most from your visit, consider these 10 tips.



1. CREATE A LIST OF HEALTH CONCERNS

- Before you book an appointment, make a list of questions you have for your Primary Care Provider, and order it from most to least urgent.



2. LET THE MEDICAL SECRETARY KNOW YOUR HEALTH NEEDS SO THEY CAN BOOK ACCORDINGLY

- Appointments are usually 15 minutes with Physicians and 30 minutes with Nurse Practitioners.
- Some Primary Care Providers will prefer one issue per visit, but that is not always the case. If you think you need more time, alert the Medical Secretary of your needs.
- Please respect the time allotted for your appointment. If need be, you can always make a follow-up appointment. Remember that your Primary Care Provider may also want to cover other items such as blood work or cancer screening.



3. KEEP A SYMPTOM DIARY

- It is easy to forget from day to day what has been happening with your body, so a symptom diary may help you remember.
- Be specific. If you are having frequent headaches, for example, note the time of day and their severity. Keep track of what seems to alleviate or worsen your symptoms.



4. MAKE YOUR QUESTIONS SPECIFIC

- Once you have figured out what issue is most urgent, you may want to consider making your questions about it as focused as possible.
- For example, you could ask what your symptoms mean. What caused the condition you are experiencing? What are the side effects to the prescribed treatment and how long may the treatment take? What is your short- and long-term prognosis?



5. SHOW YOUR LIST OF CONCERNS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE APPOINTMENT

- Let your Primary Care Provider know what is concerning you most at the beginning of your visit so that your key health issue is addressed.
- If you have written this down you may want to share a copy with your Primary Care Provider.



6. AIM FOR FULL DISCLOSURE

- It is best to be honest with your Primary Care Provider.
- Tell them about your mood, appetite, stress, sleeping habits, as well as your aches and pains.
- Ask the embarrassing questions - your provider has likely heard them all. What's more, everything discussed during your appointment is strictly confidential.



7. BRING YOUR MEDICATION INFORMATION TO THE APPOINTMENT

- Your Primary Care Provider might want to go over what medications and doses you are taking to make sure you are taking your prescriptions as intended. The best way to do that is to bring your pill bottles (if your appointment is in-person). Another option is to keep an up-to-date list in your phone or on paper, such as what you may receive from your pharmacy, which can be shared in an in-person or virtual appointment.
- Be sure that you have enough refills, especially if going on holiday.
- Also let them know if you are taking any new herbal remedies or over-the-counter medications.
- Inform them if you are using marijuana or other substances as these can interact with prescription medications.



8. HAVE A NOTEBOOK AND PEN HANDY, OR YOUR PHONE

- It is always helpful to take notes while discussing medical issues with your Primary Care Provider.
- Another option is to bring a family member or close friend to your appointment to take notes for you (see helpful resource at the end of this article).



9. ASK ABOUT TEST RESULTS

- You may be sent to have tests or lab work done. Individual Primary Care Providers have their own method of alerting you to the results.
- At the appointment, ask how results will be communicated.



10. TAKE STOCK

- At the end of your appointment, take a minute to think over the discussion you had.
- Make sure you understand what you were told and how to move forward. If you have any doubts, bring them up at that time. However, if you think of a question later, please book a follow up with your Primary Care Provider for clarification.
- This is also a time you can check in about whether there are any preventive care matters that you should be thinking about soon, such as screenings or vaccinations.

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR APPOINTMENT RESOURCE

DATE: _____

MEDICAL CONCERN:

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER'S RECOMMENDATION:

MY ACTION PLAN:

TIMELINE:

FOLLOW-UP/NEXT APPOINTMENT:

OTHER NOTES:
