

# How to Make the Most of a Doctor Visit



When a doctor knows how to really communicate well with a patient, it can make a big difference in how that patient responds. But communication is a two-way process. Listening as well as speaking to one another is something both doctor and patient must work on together. Being honest and open with each other is also important.

## *What Your Doctor Should Know about You*

Aside from a general health history, it is important that your doctor ask certain questions about the following:

- Dietary habits (Are you a frequent junk-food eater? Are you especially fond of cheesecake, sour cream, or other fatty foods?)
- Your occupation (Do you work in a high-stress job? Are you exposed to nickel, nuclear power radiation, or other toxic substances?)
- Sleep habits (Do you frequently awaken before dawn or have problems getting to sleep?)
- Family problems (Are you currently going through a divorce?)
- Lifestyle (Do you get any exercise?)
- Stress (Do you work in a noisy environment?)
- Health attitude (Are you serious about quitting smoking?)
- History of family illness (Does heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney problems, or cancer run in your family?)
- Major life events (Have you recently retired from work?)
- Living arrangements (Do you live alone?)

## *Quizzing Your Doctor*

Often, patients feel rushed or uneasy during a doctor visit. And when you're sick, there is a tendency to feel vulnerable and passive. But by heeding these suggestions, you can still make the most of your doctor-patient communications.

- Repeat back in your own words what the doctor has told you.
- Use simple phrases like "Do I hear you say that...?" or "My understanding of the problem is. . ."
- Plan ahead of time what you will say to your doctor about your problem. Your observations about a health problem can be invaluable in making a diagnosis.
- Take notes on what is wrong and what you need to do.
- If you are confused by medical terms, ask for simple definitions. There is no need to be embarrassed by this.
- When a medication is prescribed, ask about its possible side effects, its effectiveness, and how long it must be taken.
- If your doctor discusses surgery, ask about alternatives, risks, and a second opinion.
- Be frank with the doctor if any part of the office visit is annoying, such as lengthy waiting time or discourteous staff. Be tactful, but honest.
- Don't be afraid to voice your fears or apprehensions about what you've heard. The doctor may be able to clarify any misconceptions.
- Discuss any self-care practices you've used that have relieved symptoms.
- Find out the best time for the doctor to receive your phone calls should any questions arise.