



## Tips for your doctor's visit

Your visit to the doctor is your time to talk and learn about your health. Patients have a role in their health care, just like doctors, nurses, and other caregivers. This brochure includes tips for your visit to the doctor to help you become more active and involved in your health care.

## Tips for your doctor's visit

The Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.

*Helping health care organizations help patients*

## Talking with your doctor

### What you should do to prepare for your doctor's visit.

Take all of your prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements with you when you visit the doctor. If you cannot, bring a list. Include how much you take.

Write down this information to share with your doctor:

- Your health history. Include allergies and bad reactions you have had to medicines, and the dates of any surgeries and hospital visits.
- Your current health problems.
- Any questions you want to ask about your health.

### Can a family member or friend help you?

Yes. You can ask a trusted family member or friend to come with you. They can be your advocate. Your advocate can help you ask questions, take notes and remember instructions.

### What if you don't understand what your doctor is saying

Tell the doctor you do not understand. Ask more questions to help the doctor understand what you need. Tell the doctor if you need someone who speaks your preferred language or who knows sign language.

### **What if you are too embarrassed to talk about your health problems?**

It may help to write your health problems and symptoms down on paper to give to the doctor. Your advocate may be able to help you talk to the doctor about your problem.

### **Why is the doctor asking personal questions?**

The doctor needs to know about your habits so he or she can recommend the best treatment. Tell the doctor if you smoke, use recreational drugs, or are sexually active. The doctor can only talk to others about your health with your written permission.

### **Why is your doctor sending you to another doctor?**

Your doctor may send you to see a specialist. Specialists include heart doctors and doctors who treat cancer. Ask why the doctor recommends that you see another doctor.

### **What should you ask about new medicines your doctor prescribes?**

- Why do you need a new medicine? How will it help you?
- What is the name of the medicine?
- Is there a generic medicine you can take?
- Is there a medicine on your insurance company's preferred list of medicines that will work for you?
- Is the medicine a liquid or a pill?
- What are the directions for taking the medicine? Repeat the directions back to the doctor. Ask the doctor to write down the directions.
- What are the side effects?
- Can you take it with your current medicines? Should you stop taking any of your current medicines, vitamins or herbal supplements?

- Should you avoid any foods, drinks, or alcohol when taking the medicine?
- Would the medicine still work if you use half of it? For example, can you cut a pill in half?
- Can they give you a list of all your medicines?

### **You may need to ask about end-of-life care:**

There may come a time when you should talk to your doctor about end-of-life care. It is important to:

- Involve your family. They will be affected by your decisions.
- Get the facts about your illness or condition from an expert.
- Find out about the benefits and burdens of any treatment. These burdens can be physical, emotional and financial.
- Find out about what to expect if you are not treated.
- After you have all the information, think about your needs and wishes. Make decisions based on what is best for you.
- Share your decisions with your family and health care team.
- Ask if you can get hospice care to help you with side effects or symptoms of your illness or treatments.

### **Tips for the examination**

#### **What can you do if you are uncomfortable being examined?**

Tell the doctor or nurse how you can be made more comfortable. Let them know if you would like a nurse or your advocate to stay with you.

### **Don't be afraid to ask the doctor or caregiver if they washed their hands.**

Doctors, nurses and other caregivers can forget to wash their hands. Remind them if you don't see them wash their hands. Hand washing helps prevent infection.

### **Make sure the doctor or caregiver wears clean gloves before examining you.**

Ask them to wear clean gloves before giving shots, touching wounds, or examining your mouth or private parts.

### **After your doctor's visit**

#### **Learn more about your condition.**

Information can be found at the library, from support groups and on websites. A good place to look is MedlinePlus. It is a government website with health information written in easy-to-understand language. Check it out at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>.

#### **What if you are not sure about the treatment?**

Make an appointment with another doctor to get a second opinion.

#### **How can you find out if a hospital or facility is a good one?**

- Talk to your doctor. Ask about the organization's experience taking care of people with your condition. How often do they perform the procedure you need? What special care do they provide to help patients get well?
- Find out if the organization is accredited by The Joint Commission. Accredited means that the organization follows rules that guide safe and quality patient care. Visit The Joint Commission's Quality Check website at [www.qualitycheck.org](http://www.qualitycheck.org).

### **Check out these other Speak Up brochures for more information:**

Speak Up: Help Avoid Mistakes in Your Surgery

Speak Up: Help Prevent Medical Test Mistakes

Speak Up: Know Your Rights

Speak Up: What you need to know about your serious illness and palliative care

See all the [Speak Up materials](#) on The Joint Commission website.

[www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)