

Partnering With Your Doctor

Give Information. Don't Wait to Be Asked!

- You know important things about your symptoms and your health history. Tell your doctor what you think he or she needs to know.
- It is important to tell your doctor personal information—even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- Bring a "health history" list with you, and keep it up to date. You might want to make a copy of the form for each member of your family.
- Always bring any medicines you are taking, or a list of those medicines (include when and how often you take them) and what strength. Talk about any allergies or reactions you have had to your medicines.
- Tell your doctor about any herbal products you use or alternative medicines or treatments you receive.
- Bring other medical information, such as x-ray films, test results and medical records.



Get Information.

- Ask questions. If you don't, your doctor may think you understand everything that was said.
- Write down your questions before your visit. List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.



- You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions. This person can also help you understand and/or remember the answers.
 - Ask your doctor to draw pictures if that might help to explain something.
 - Take notes.
 - Some doctors do not mind if you bring a tape recorder to help you remember things. But always ask first.
- Let your doctor know if you need more time. If there is not time that day, perhaps you can speak to a nurse or physician assistant on staff. Or, ask if you can call later to speak with someone.
 - Ask if your doctor has washed his or her hands before starting to examine you. Research shows that handwashing can prevent the spread of infections. If you're uncomfortable asking this question directly, you might ask, "I've noticed that some doctors and nurses wash their hands or wear gloves before touching people. Why is that?"



Understand your diagnosis:

- What is wrong with me?
- What do I need to do to get better?
- Where can I get more information about my condition?



If you need a lab test, an x-ray, or another kind of test, ask your doctor:

- How will the test be done?
- How accurate will the results be?
- What are the benefits and risks of the test?
- When and how will I receive the results?
- What should I do if I don't receive the results?



If you receive a prescription for a new medicine:

- What is the name of the medicine?
- What is it supposed to do?
- When should I take the medicine, and how much should I take?
- Does the medicine have any side effects?



If you need surgery:

- What kind of operation do I need?
- Why do I need an operation?
- What are the benefits and risks of the operation?
- How long will it take to recover?
- What will happen if I don't have the operation?
- Are there any other treatments I could have instead of an operation?
- Where can I get a second opinion?



Take Information Home

- Ask for written instructions.
- Your doctor also may have brochures and audio tapes and videotapes that can help you. If not, ask how you can get such materials.



Once You Leave the Doctor's Office, Follow Up

- If you have questions, call.
- If your symptoms get worse, or if you have problems with your medicine, call.
- If you had tests and do not hear from your doctor, call for your test results.
- If your doctor said you need to have certain tests, make appointments at the lab or other offices to get them done.
- If your doctor said you should see a specialist, make an appointment.