

Making Connections

Being an active part of your healthcare team and communicating clearly will help your doctors help you receive the highest quality of care.

What to tell your doctor - Tell your doctor the most important things first so you won't get off-track: your reason for the visit, a clear statement of your symptoms or problems, when they happened and for how long. Having written records of your health history will help your doctor. The list should include any operations you have had, any treatments or tests you have taken, and any medicines you are taking. If you see several doctors, all may not know your full medical history and a written record will keep the record straight. Tell your doctor about your family's history of diseases and conditions. Be honest about your health and lifestyle. Withholding information can hurt your medical care.

Ask questions – It's good to write your questions down before you arrive. Take a friend or relative with you, and tell them what role you want them to play. Ask the most important questions first. Ask about any fears or concerns. If your doctor tells you something you don't understand, ask for definitions, or have the doctor explain it in a different way. No question is unimportant or dumb. Write down the answers to the questions. Ask if you can follow-up if you have questions later, and whether a telephone call or e-mail is the best way to communicate.

Follow-up – If you have other questions, call the doctor. Follow your doctor's directions about ordering any medications and take them as long as prescribed. Make appointments for any tests or specialists. If you don't hear from your doctor about test results, call. If you don't understand the results, ask what they mean.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)