



**HEALTH
SMARTS**

Learn. Understand. Take action.

Tips on what to do

BEFORE YOUR HEALTH CARE APPOINTMENT

Issue 2

This document is part of a series of information resources to help you get good quality health care.

1

For advice right away, call the 24/7 nurseline at your health plan or doctor's office

Talking with the nurse can help you decide whether you need to come in for care and how soon you need to be seen (**please see your medical ID card for the phone number**). These nurses are knowledgeable and patient. Talking with this nurse can be a good opportunity to have an in-depth discussion about the details of your care.

- If you need to come in for an appointment, ask what you should do for your health problem until you are able to be seen.
- If you don't need to come in, you can get advice over the phone on how to handle your problem and what symptoms to watch for.

2

Find information to help understand your health condition, systems, or treatment choices

To get good quality care, you need to be informed and involved in health care decision making. It can often be helpful to gather some information before you go in to see your doctor or other health professional. Look for information that helps you understand your health condition, the symptoms you are having, and the possible choices you may have about treatment.

Where can you get health information?

Websites can be a great source of health information – as long as you are careful about which websites you use. The information on some websites is not trustworthy.

How can you use the information you find?

What you learn from gathering information can give you a better idea of what you and your doctor may need to talk about during your appointment. If you have gathered information from websites or other sources, you might want to take it along to your appointment and discuss it with your doctor or other health professional.

3

Make lists to take to your appointment (questions you want to ask, medications you take, etc.)

Making written lists can help you organize your thoughts and concerns and feel more confident about talking with your doctor or other health care provider. Take your lists with you to your visit.

1. A list of all the things you want to tell or show your doctor or other health care professional during your visit.

What you write on this list will vary depending on your health condition and the reasons for your medical visit. For example, it could include specific symptoms you've been having and when they started. If you have gathered health information on your own, you might want to take a copy with you to discuss during your visit.

2. A list of the questions you want to ask during your visit.

Learn More

For detailed advice on how and why to ask questions, see “**Questions are the answer**” at the website of the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/).

- It includes checklists of questions to ask in different situations, such as when you get a new prescription or when you are having tests or surgery.
- You can even customize and print your own list of questions to take with you to a medical visit.

3. A list of all medications you are currently taking (prescription medicines, non-prescription medicines, vitamins, herbal remedies, and other supplements).

The single biggest “medical error” involves mistakes in medications. This can include giving patients a medicine they are allergic to or a medicine that does not work well with the other medicines the patient is taking. Medication mistakes can be serious.

To give you care that is safe and appropriate, your doctors and other health professionals need to know about *everything* you are currently taking.

- Your list should include prescription medicines, vitamins and other supplements, herbal remedies, and any medicines that you buy without a prescription. Don’t forget to include “over-the-counter” medications such as ibuprofen or aspirin.

4. A list of your allergies (including any bad reactions you have had to medications).

To make sure that any new medications or treatments are safe for you, your doctors and other health care providers need to know about all of your allergies, especially any allergies to medications.

4

Consider asking a friend or family member to go with you to your appointment

- They can be helpful, especially if you are having serious health problems or feeling uncertain or concerned.
- They can help you listen carefully, help you ask the right questions, and take notes for you.