



Tips on what to do DURING YOUR HEALTH CARE APPOINTMENT

Issue 3

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

1

Come prepared — bring and share a list of questions you want to ask, medications you take, etc.

- Taking written lists to your visit makes it easy for you to tell the nurses, doctors, and other health professionals the things they need to know about your symptoms, medications, and other health issues.
- **For help in asking questions, use resources.**

Learn More

For help in asking questions during your health care appointment, visit the website called “**Questions are the answer**” (www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/). It is run by the federal Agency for Health Care Research and Quality.

- 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.

2

Ask questions — and if you don’t understand the answers, ask again

Asking questions is one of the best ways to help make sure that you are getting quality care. Below are some suggestions about asking questions during your visit.

- **Ask the questions on your written list.** Go over the written list of questions that you brought with you to the visit to make sure you don’t miss any of them.

- **Speak up whenever you are confused or have concerns about what is said.**
 - If a nurse, doctor, or other health professional says something that’s unclear or confusing, you need to let them know right away.
 - If you aren’t happy with the treatment the doctor recommends, or you have other concerns, you need to let the doctor know. You can say that you have a concern. You can ask whether there might be another treatment to consider.
- **To double check on how well you’ve understood, repeat what you’ve heard using your own words.**
 - It’s important to be sure you understand what is said about your health and what you need to do. You might be given a lot of new information during your visit and there may be technical terms that are unfamiliar to you. It’s hard to absorb new information in a short period of time.
 - Whether you are feeling confused or not, it’s wise to make a habit of checking on how well you understand what is said during your medical visit. It’s always better to double check than to assume you understood and then find out later you were wrong.
- **If you don’t understand an answer it’s okay to ask again.** If the nurse or doctor answers your question and you *still* don’t understand, you need to say so.
 - Don’t be embarrassed to repeat the same question. Remember, it’s your body and you need to be sure you understand.
- **Ask questions about medications and other treatments.**
 - Ask why you need to take the medicine and what it is supposed to do.
 - Be sure you understand exactly how to take the medicine (when, how much, and for how long).
 - For safety, ask about possible “side effects” that the medicine might cause. Ask whether there are any symptoms or problems you should be watching for and what to do if you notice them.
- **If any questions come up after you leave the office, call back and ask.**

3

Take notes to help remember what was said and what you need to do

Taking notes during your visit is a good way to make sure that you remember what the doctor or other health professional said when you get home. Notes are good reminders about the instructions you need to follow and the symptoms you need to watch for.

Ask your doctor if a brochure is available with information regarding your condition. If any questions come up when you read it, call your doctor’s office.