



Tips for getting THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF CARE

Issue 8

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

What is the “right amount” of care?

Getting the “right amount” of health care means that you are getting *as much care as you need*, without going through unnecessary care. Unnecessary care is care that you don’t really need. Here are some examples:

- Having lab tests done when you need them is the “right amount” of care. Repeating the same lab tests when you see a different doctor – instead of just using the test results you already have – would be unnecessary care.
- Getting antibiotics for an infection that is helped by antibiotics is the “right amount” of care. Getting antibiotics for an infection that is not helped by antibiotics – such as the common cold – would be unnecessary care.
- Staying on schedule with the preventive care and screening tests that are recommended for your age and health condition is the “right amount” of care. Having preventive care and screening tests more often than recommended would be unnecessary care.

Getting the right amount of care is part of *good quality health care* and *wise use of resources*

Getting the right amount of care – not too little and not too much – is **best for your health**. It also makes **wise use of time and money** spent on health care.

- **Getting *as much care as you need* is crucial for good health.** If you *can’t* or *don’t* get as much care as you need, it can lead to more serious health conditions that are harder to treat successfully and may also cost more to treat. If you develop health problems because you didn’t get the care you needed, it’s not good for your health and it’s not wise use of money spent on health care.

- **Getting *more* care than you really need is *not* good for your health.**
 - Getting care you don't need can take time away from other things you could be doing. It can be hard on you and your family, adding unnecessary stress to your life.
 - Getting care you don't need can even be harmful to your health. For example, studies show that some surgery that is done is not really necessary. Evidence from research on patient care shows that, for some conditions, treatments that are simpler and less risky than surgery actually work better. If you don't need a certain type of treatment, why expose yourself to risks that might be part of that treatment?
- **Getting care you don't need also adds to the cost.** Whether the money comes out of your own pocket or is paid for by your health benefits, it is not a wise use of resources to spend money on care that isn't needed. When employees are given care they don't need, this can lead to higher premiums.

What *can* you do to help make sure you are getting the “right amount” of care?

How can you know whether you and your family are getting the right amount of care – not too little, not too much – but just right? Here are some tips:

1 You can call a 24/7 nurseline for information and advice

If you think you might need care but you are not sure, you can call the 24/7 nurseline (see your ID card for the number). Talking with the advice nurse can help you decide whether you need to come in for care and how soon you need to be seen. Sometimes you will need an appointment for care. Other times, it may work just as well to get advice over the phone on how to handle your problem and what symptoms to watch for.

2 You can ask questions

When you have decisions to make about your care, or a doctor has recommended that you get certain tests or treatment, information can be helpful. You can ask questions to be sure that you understand why the care is needed and what it is supposed to do. Getting more information from your doctor or other health provider can help you decide whether you are getting as much care as you need. It can also help you decide whether certain care might be unnecessary.

Learn More

For help in asking questions, visit this government website: www.ahrq.questionsaretheanswer.gov. It is run by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. This website has tips for patients on how and why to ask questions.

- It includes checklists of questions to ask in different situations, such as when you get a new prescription or 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

You can look for more information on your own

When you have health concerns or decisions to make, finding trustworthy health information on your own can be helpful. You can use this information to help understand your health condition and treatment choices and know what questions to ask about your care.

4

You can get a “second opinion” from another doctor

If you are facing a major decision about treatment, and your doctor has made a recommendation, it's wise to check with another doctor as well. Your doctor will expect you to get a second opinion and will not take it as a criticism or lack of confidence on your part.