



Senior Series

*The Ohio
Department of
Aging*



For more information, visit the Ohio Department of Aging web site at: <http://www.state.oh.us/age/>
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Helping Your Doctor Help You

You and your doctor are partners and share a common goal—**YOUR GOOD HEALTH**. As a partner, your task is to give the doctor clear and concise information. The doctor's responsibility is to use the information to help you get well and stay healthy. By working together, you can avoid medical complications and maintain your good health.

As we grow older, patient-doctor communication becomes critical for the appropriate use of prescription medications. Unfortunately however, communication is often inadequate between patient and doctor, resulting in medication mismanagement.

What factors contribute to poor communication between patient and doctor?

- **Limited time.** Because patient visits often last less than 15 minutes, there is little time devoted to discussing the types of medications prescribed and how to take them.

- **Medical Terms.** Frequently doctors use unfamiliar medical terms that patients may not fully understand. This can result in miscommunication as well as frustration, especially for the patient.
- **Patient Hesitation or Discomfort.** Patients may feel uncomfortable asking questions or may hesitate to ask questions because they are not certain what to ask.

How should you prepare for a visit to your doctor?

Remember, you are the expert when it comes to noting the changes in your body. It is your responsibility to give the doctor information needed to diagnose your problem and prescribe the proper treatment.

- Before the visit, write down information that your doctor needs to know (Items for this list are provided on the next page).

- Write a list of questions you have about your condition or your treatment.
- Bring all the medications you take with you to the doctor's office.
- Arrange to take someone with you to the doctor. This person can write down what the doctor says and help you to remember.

What information should provide to your doctor?

- **Your concerns.** Explain changes in bodily functions you have experienced—for example, changes in sleep and bowel habits, headaches, pain, or fatigue. Be clear and specific.
- **Allergies.** Remind the doctor about any allergies you have to medications, foods, and other substances. Describe the reactions you have experienced.
- **Adverse medication reactions.** If you have ever experienced a negative reaction to a medication (i.e., hives or upset stomach) be sure to tell your doctor and describe what happened.
- **All medications currently taking.** Tell the doctor about all the medications you take even those that do not require a prescription, such as aspirin and laxatives. Share this information with every doctor you see to avoid a duplication of medications or be prescribed a medication that adversely interacts with something you are currently taking.

- **Other medicinal items.** Be sure to share information about any other items you are taking such as herbs, vitamins, or mineral supplements.
- **Caffeine and alcohol intake.** List the amount of coffee, tea, soft drinks, and alcohol you consume in an average day.
- **Tobacco habits.** Inform the doctor about the amount of tobacco you use daily, such as the number of cigarettes or cigars, the number of times you smoke a pipe, or the amount of tobacco you chew every day.

What should you do at the doctor's office?

- **Be persistent.** If the doctor does not have time to answer your questions, ask for someone who can. Answering your questions is part of the doctor's responsibility. There may be other health professionals in the office who focus on education and information.
- **Speak up!** If you do not understand say so. Tell the doctor if you do not understand the words he or she uses. You have a right to information about your health and prescription medications, in language that is familiar to you.
- **Write it down.** During your visit, write down what the doctor tells you about your condition and what he or she is prescribing for treatment.
- **Before you leave.** Review the information you are given with either the

doctor or another health care professional to be sure you understand and all of your questions have been asked.

Remember: Once you leave the doctor's office, you are responsible for obtaining your medications, using them as instructed, and reporting any problems. By openly communicating, you

and your doctor can work to maintain your good health.

Reference

Senior Series Volume 2, The Center on Rural Elderly, University of Missouri System.

A doctor's advice is good only if you follow it!

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