

How to Get the Most Out of Your Next Doctor's Visit

As we age, visits to your doctor and other specialists become more frequent and sometimes more stressful – especially for seniors who are managing a chronic condition.

Having a basic plan can help you make the most of your appointment, whether you are starting with a new doctor or continuing with the doctor you've seen for years. Here are some tips you can use to prepare for your next doctor's visit.

Preparing For Your Appointment

Write Down Your Questions

List the things you want to discuss with the doctor. Perhaps you have fallen recently, or maybe you are concerned about the side effects of a particular prescription. These are things you want to discuss with your physician, and writing them down will help you remember! Most appointments last around 15 to 20 minutes, so remember to be realistic about what you can accomplish in a single visit. If you discover that you have a laundry list of questions and concerns, try to prioritize your top two or three items. If you are unable to cover everything, ask your doctor about scheduling a follow-up.

Make a List of Your Medications

Before your appointment, make a list of all prescriptions, vitamins, supplements, and over-the-counter medications you take. Be sure to include the dosage, what you use it for, and medication instructions. Your medications may change over time, so be sure to bring up-to-date information to every appointment. The National Institute on Aging has [an easy-to-use template](#) that you can print and fill out prior to your visit.

Know Your Health History

Being able to talk to your doctor about any previous medical problems and procedures can make an office visit more efficient. Again, it might be helpful to have this written out as well. Genetics matter, too, so knowing your family's health history can also be beneficial.

Gather Important Documents

Even if you have seen this doctor previously, it's always wise to bring your Medicare or insurance card. If you currently see any other doctors or specialists, make a list of their names and office phone numbers, just in case they need to be reached. If you have any important medical records or recent test results from another physician, bring those with you as well.

During Your Visit

Get Straight to the Point

Remember, you have a limited amount of time with the physician, so use it wisely. Fill your doctor in on any changes in your health since your last visit. Mention any health changes you have noticed. This is the time to go over your top two or three questions or concerns. (Remember: It's about quality over quantity. If you don't get to everything on your laundry list of discussion items, ask if you can make another appointment or follow-up with the doctor's nurse.)

Be Honest

Be direct, honest, and specific when recounting your symptoms or expressing your concerns. Many patients are reluctant or embarrassed to discuss their symptoms. This only makes your doctor's job more difficult, and it could prevent you from receiving the care you need.

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Take Notes

Consider taking a pen and notepad with you to write down some notes during your visit. Once you leave the office, it's easy to forget what was said, but looking back on your notes from the visit will help jog your memory. If you discuss a specific condition or a new prescription during your appointment, ask your doctor if he or she has any informational pamphlets that you might take home with you.

Speak Up

If you are unclear about something your doctor says or they are speaking too quickly for you to understand, ask them to repeat the information. Again, you only have a few minutes with the physician, but those few minutes belong to you. If something doesn't make sense, speak up.

Visiting the doctor can often be a stressful experience, especially for seniors. But with a little preparedness, doctors' visits can go a lot smoother and can result in better care.