

Share:    

What Should I Ask My Doctor During a Checkup?

Asking questions is key to good communication with your doctor. If you don't ask questions, he or she may assume you already know the answer or that you don't want more information. Don't wait for the doctor to raise a specific question or subject; he or she may not know it's important to you. Be proactive. Ask questions when you don't know the meaning of a word (like aneurysm, [hypertension](#), or infarct) or when instructions aren't clear (for example, does taking medicine with food mean before, during, or after a meal?).

5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit



Learn about medical tests

Sometimes, doctors need to do blood tests, X-rays, or other procedures to find out what is wrong or to learn more about your medical condition. Some tests, such as Pap tests, mammograms, [glaucoma](#) tests, and screenings for [prostate](#) and [colorectal cancer](#), are done regularly to check for hidden medical problems.

Before having a medical test, ask your doctor to explain why it is important, what it will show, and what it will cost. Ask what kind of things you need to do to prepare for the test. For example, you may need to have an empty stomach, or you may have to provide a urine sample. Ask how you will be notified of the test results and how long they will take to come in.

Questions to ask your doctor before a medical test

- Why is the test being done?
- What steps does the test involve? How should I get ready?
- Are there any dangers or side effects?
- How will I find out the results? How long will it take to get the results?
- What will we know after the test?

When the results are ready, make sure the doctor tells you what they are and explains what they mean. You may want to ask your doctor for a written copy of the test results. If the test is done by a specialist, ask to have the results sent to your primary doctor.

Discuss your diagnosis and what to expect

A diagnosis identifies your disease or physical problem. The doctor makes a diagnosis based on the symptoms you are experiencing and the results of the physical exam, laboratory work, and other tests.

If you understand your medical condition, you can help make better decisions about treatment. If you know what to expect, it may be easier for you to deal with the condition.

Ask the doctor to tell you the name of the condition and why he or she thinks you have it. Ask how it may affect you and how long it might last. Some medical problems never go away completely. They can't be cured, but they can be treated or managed.

Questions to ask your doctor about your diagnosis

- What may have caused this condition? Will it be permanent?
- How is this condition treated or managed? What will be the long-term effects on my life?
- How can I learn more about my condition?

Understand your medications

Your doctor may [prescribe a drug](#) for your condition. Make sure you know the name of the drug and understand why it has been prescribed for you. Ask the doctor to write down how often and for how long you should take it.

Make notes about any other special instructions. If you are taking other medications, make sure your doctor knows what they are, so he or she can prevent harmful drug interactions. Check with your doctor's office before taking any over-the-counter medications.

Let the doctor know if your medicine doesn't seem to be working or if it is causing problems. If you want to stop taking your medicine, check with your doctor first.

You may find it helpful to keep a chart of all the medicines you take and when you take them. Download, print, and copy the [Medications](#) worksheet.

Paying for medications

Don't hesitate to ask the doctor about the cost of your medications. If they are too expensive for you, the doctor may be able to suggest less expensive alternatives. You can ask if there is a generic or other less expensive choice. You could say, for instance: *"It turns out that this medicine is too expensive for me. Is there another one or a generic drug that would cost less?"*

Get [answers to commonly asked questions about medicines](#), including how to save money on medications.

You may also be interested in

- Learning [five ways to get the most out of your doctor's visit](#)
- Reading about [how to prepare for a doctor's appointment](#)
- Getting tips for [talking with your doctor about sensitive issues](#)

For more information about questions to ask the doctor

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

800-232-4636

888-232-6348 (TTY)

cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

Medicare

800-633-4227

877-486-2048 (TTY)

www.cms.gov

www.medicare.gov

MedlinePlus

National Library of Medicine

www.medlineplus.gov

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

301-427-1364

info@ahrq.hhs.gov

www.ahrq.gov

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

Content reviewed: February 3, 2020

[Return to top](#)

Newsletters

Sign up to receive updates and resources delivered to your inbox.

Sign up

nia.nih.gov

An official website of the [National Institutes of Health](#)