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What Do I Need to Tell the Doctor?

Talking about your health means sharing information about how you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally. Knowing how to describe your symptoms and bring up other concerns will help you become a partner in your health care. Use these [worksheets](#) to organize your questions and information when talking with your doctor.

5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit



Share any symptoms you have

A symptom is evidence of a disease or disorder in the body. Examples of symptoms include [pain](#), fever, a lump or bump, unexplained weight loss or gain, or [having a hard time sleeping](#).

Be clear and concise when describing your symptoms. Your description helps the doctor identify the problem. A physical exam and medical tests provide valuable information, but your symptoms point the doctor in the right direction.

Your doctor will ask when your symptoms started, what time of day they happen, how long they last (seconds? days?), how often they occur, if they seem to be getting worse or better, and if they keep you from going out or doing your usual activities.

Take the time to make some notes about your symptoms before you call or visit the doctor. Worrying about your symptoms is not a sign of weakness. Being honest about what you are experiencing doesn't mean that you are complaining. The doctor needs to know how you feel.

Questions to ask yourself about your symptoms:

- What exactly are my symptoms?
- Are the symptoms constant? If not, when do I experience them?
- Does anything I do make the symptoms better? Or worse?
- Do the symptoms affect my daily activities? Which ones? How?

Give information about all your medications

It is possible for medicines to interact, causing unpleasant and sometimes dangerous side effects. Your doctor needs to know about ALL of the medicines you take, including over-the-counter (nonprescription) drugs and herbal remedies or [supplements](#). Make a list or bring everything with you to your visit—don't forget about eye drops, vitamins, and laxatives. Tell the doctor how often you take each. Describe any drug allergies or reactions you have had. Say which medications work best for you. Be sure your doctor has the phone number of the pharmacy you use. The [Medications](#) worksheet can help.

[What questions should you ask your doctor about a new medication?](#)

Tell the doctor about your habits

To provide the best care, your doctor must understand you as a person and know what your life is like. The doctor may ask about where you live, [what you eat](#), how you sleep, what you do each day, what [activities you enjoy](#), what your [sex life](#) is like, and if you smoke or drink. Be open and honest with your doctor. It will help him or her to understand your medical conditions fully and recommend the best treatment choices for you.

Share other concerns in your life with your doctor

Your health has a big impact on other parts of your life. Your doctor may ask you how your life is going. This isn't being impolite or nosy. Information about what's happening in your life may be useful medically. Let the doctor know about any major changes or stresses in your life, such as a divorce or the [death of a loved one](#). You don't have to go into detail; you may want to say something like: *"It might be helpful for you to know that my sister passed away since my last visit with you,"* or *"I recently had to sell my home and move in with my daughter."*

The coronavirus pandemic and physical distancing requirements can also bring about feelings of loneliness and social isolation. These feelings are associated with higher risk for depression, anxiety, and heart disease. It is important to let your doctor know when these feelings occur and how often.

You may have some concerns or wishes about your care if you become seriously ill. If you have questions about what choices you have, ask your doctor. You can specify your desires through legal documents called [advance directives](#). In general, the best time to talk with your doctor about these issues is while you are still relatively healthy. [Medicare](#) and private health insurance may cover these discussions with your doctor. One way to bring up the subject is to say: *"I'm worried about what would happen in the hospital if I were very sick and not likely to get better. Can you tell me what generally happens in that case?"*

[Learn more about advance care planning.](#)

Another hard decision that many older people face is whether or not to move to a place where they can have more help—often an [assisted living facility](#). If you are considering such a move, your doctor can help you weigh the pros and cons based on your health and other circumstances. He or she may be able to refer you to a social worker or a local agency that can help in finding an assisted living facility.

[Read more information about long-term care.](#)

You may also be interested in

- Downloading and using [worksheets for talking with your doctor](#)
- Viewing and sharing [an infographic with five ways to make the most of your doctor's visit](#)
- Learning about [how to prepare for a doctor's appointment](#)

For more information about what to tell the doctor

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