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Taking Someone to a Doctor's Appointment: Tips for Caregivers

Many older adults find it helpful when a family member or friend goes with them to the doctor's office. In some cases, all the person needs is a ride, and you can wait in the lobby. Other times, the person may want or need you to talk to the doctor with them. This article provides tips that will help you be an ally and an advocate when you accompany someone to a medical appointment.

Talking with health care providers

First, you will need to make sure that the person's health care providers have permission to speak with you. There are federal and state laws that protect a person's private medical information. If the person would like their health care providers to share information with you, here's what you can do:



- If you go with the person to an appointment, they can tell the doctor verbally that they agree to have you there. The person can also tell the health care provider that it's okay to share information with you later.
- If you want to access a person's medical records or speak with a provider when the person isn't there, you will need to get legal permission.
- Most doctor's offices and hospitals have a consent form (sometimes called a HIPAA release or a HIPAA waiver) to specify who can have access to a person's private medical information. Ask the older person to provide your name and contact information on this form at each provider's office.
- In some cases, it might make sense to get a medical power of attorney. This will enable you to access information and make health care decisions on the person's behalf. Make sure all the person's health care providers have a copy of the legal document.

Find out about [advance care planning and health care decisions](#) for family members and caregivers.

The Caregiver's Handbook

Explore this guide to getting started with caregiving, finding support, and taking care of yourself.

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How to prepare for a doctor's visit

Gather important information beforehand and take it with you to the appointment:

- Take the person's insurance cards, names and phone numbers of other doctors they see, and their medical records if the doctor doesn't already have them. You may want to ask the doctor to send you all the forms the person will need to complete for their visit.
- Bring a list with the names, dosage, and schedule of all medicines, vitamins, herbal remedies, over-the-counter drugs, and dietary supplements the older adult is taking. Don't forget to include those prescribed by other doctors. To keep track, you can use the [Worksheet: Managing Medications and Supplements](#) (PDF, 161K).
- Make sure the person remembers to take their eyeglasses or contact lenses to the doctor's visit. If they have a hearing aid, make sure that it is working well and they're wearing it. Tell the person to let the doctor and staff know if they have a hard time seeing or hearing.
- Make a list of any questions or concerns that the older adult or other caregivers would like to bring up with the doctor.

You can also review [these worksheets](#) to prepare for talking with the person's doctor.

If the doctor doesn't speak the person's language, ask the office staff to provide an interpreter. Call the doctor's office ahead of time because they may need to plan for an interpreter from the same area or country to be available. Ensuring that the older adult can easily understand and talk with the interpreter is important for getting good care.

What to do during a doctor's visit

Here are several ways you could be helpful during the appointment:

- Bring your list of questions, starting with the most important ones, and take notes on what the doctor recommends. Writing things down will help both you and the older person remember what the doctor said, and you can share the information with other caregivers later.
- When the doctor asks a question, let the older adult answer unless you have been asked to do so.
- It's easy to get into a two-way conversation between you and the doctor — try not to do this. Always include the person you care for when you talk with the doctor.
- Respect the person's privacy and leave the room when requested. The person may want a chance to ask questions or discuss sensitive topics privately with their doctor. Read more about [talking with your doctor about](#)

[sensitive issues](#).

What to do after a doctor's visit

There are many ways to follow up after the appointment. For example:

- If you live out of town, talk to the doctor about how you can keep up to date on the older adult's health. With the person's permission, it might be helpful to get access to their electronic health records.
- Ask the doctor for written materials to take home and see if they can recommend community resources, if needed.
- Find help and support. Larger medical practices, hospitals, and nursing homes often have a social worker on staff who may have valuable suggestions about online or community services.

5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit



You may also be interested in

- Downloading [worksheets](#) that help organize questions and information for a medical appointment
- Reading [five ways to get the most out of a doctor's visit](#)
- Learning about [telehealth appointments](#)

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For more information about helping an older adult coordinate medical care

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

eldercarelocator@USAgings.org

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

Medicaid

877-267-2323

866-226-1819 (TTY)

Medicaid.gov@cms.hhs.gov

www.medicaid.gov

Medicare

800-633-4227 (1-800-MEDICARE)

877-486-2048 (TTY)

www.medicare.gov

Caregiver Action Network

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