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How to Prepare for a Doctor's Appointment

[Español](#)

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. The following tips will make it easier for you and your doctor to cover everything you need to talk about.

Make a list and prioritize your concerns

Make a list of what you want to discuss. For example, do you have a new symptom you want to ask the doctor about? Do you want to [get a flu shot](#)? Are you concerned about how a treatment is affecting your daily life? If you have more than a few items to discuss, put them in order and ask about the most important ones first. Don't put off the things that are really on your mind until the end of your appointment—bring them up right away! The [Talking With Your Doctor](#) worksheets can help.

5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit



Take information with you to the doctor

Some doctors suggest you put all your [prescription drugs](#), over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal remedies or [supplements](#) in a bag and bring them with you. Others recommend you [bring a list](#) of everything you take and the dose. You should also take your insurance cards, names and phone numbers of other doctors you see, and your medical records if the doctor doesn't already have them.

Consider bringing a family member or friend to the doctor's office

Sometimes it is helpful to bring a family member or close friend with you. Let your family member or friend know in advance what you want from your visit. Your companion can remind you what you planned to discuss with the doctor if you forget. She or he can take notes for you and can help you remember what the doctor said.

Don't let your companion take too strong a role. The visit is between you and the doctor. You may want some time alone with the doctor to [discuss personal matters](#). If you are alone with the doctor during or right after the physical exam, this might be a good time to raise private concerns. Or, you could ask your family member or friend to stay in the waiting room for part of the appointment. For the best results, let your companion know in advance how he or she can be most helpful.



Getting started with a new doctor

Your first meeting is a good time to talk with the doctor and the office staff about some communication basics.

Introduce yourself. When you see the doctor and office staff, introduce yourself and let them know by what name you prefer to be called. For example: *"Hello, my name is Mrs. Martinez,"* or *"Good morning, my name is Bob Smith. Please call me Bob."*

Ask how the office runs. Learn what days are busiest and what times are best to call. Ask what to do if there is an emergency, or if you need a doctor when the office is closed.

Share your medical history. Tell the doctor about your illnesses, operations, medical conditions, and other doctors you see. You may want to ask the doctor to send you a copy of the medical history form before your visit so you can fill it out at home, where you have the time and information you need to complete it. If you have problems understanding how to fill out any of the forms, ask for help. Some community organizations provide this kind of help.

Share former doctors' names. Give the new doctor all of your former doctors' names and addresses, especially if they are in a different city. This is to help your new doctor get copies of your medical records.

[Read and share this infographic](#) and spread the word about ways that may help foster healthy aging.

Your doctor will ask you to sign a medical release form giving him or her permission to request your records.

Keep your doctor up to date

Let your doctor know what has happened in your life since your last visit. If you have been treated in the emergency room or by a specialist, tell the doctor right away. Mention any changes you have noticed in your appetite, weight, [sleep](#), or energy level. Also tell the doctor about any recent changes in any [medications](#) you take or the effects they have had on you. Use these [worksheets](#) to organize your questions and information when talking with your doctor.

Be sure you can see and hear as well as possible

Many older people use glasses or need [aids for hearing](#). Remember to take your eyeglasses to the doctor's visit. If you have a hearing aid, make sure that it is working well and wear it. Let the doctor and staff know if you have a hard time [seeing](#) or hearing. For example, you may want to say: *"My hearing makes it hard to understand everything you're saying. It helps a lot when you speak slowly and face me when you're talking."*

Request an interpreter if you need one

If the doctor you selected or were referred to doesn't speak your language, ask the doctor's office to provide an interpreter. Even though some English-speaking doctors know basic medical terms in Spanish or other languages, you may feel more comfortable speaking in your own language, especially when it comes to [sensitive subjects](#), such as [sexuality](#) or [depression](#). Call the doctor's office ahead of time, as they may need to plan for an interpreter to be available.

Always let the doctor, your interpreter, or the staff know if you do not understand your diagnosis or the instructions the doctor gives you. Don't let language barriers stop you from asking questions or voicing your concerns.

Using an interpreter at the doctor's office

- Consider telling your interpreter what you want to talk about with your doctor before the appointment.
- If your language is spoken in multiple countries, such as Spanish, and your interpreter does not come from the same country or background as you, use universal terms to describe your symptoms and communicate your concerns.
- Make sure your interpreter understands your symptoms or condition so that he or she can correctly translate your message to the doctor. You don't want the doctor to prescribe the wrong medication!
- Don't be afraid to let your interpreter know if you did not understand something that was said, even if you need to ask that it be repeated several times.

You may also be interested in

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

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