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# Five Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Doctor's Visit

Have you ever left your doctor's office realizing you forgot to ask an important question? Or were you frustrated because you didn't fully understand the doctor's instructions? These tips may help.

## 1. Decide what questions are most important to ask the doctor

Before your appointment, pick three or four questions or [concerns that you most want to talk about with the doctor](#). You can tell him or her what they are at the beginning of the appointment, and then discuss each in turn. If you have time, you can then go on to other questions.

### 5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit



## 2. Stay focused on why you are there

Although your doctor might like to talk with you at length, each patient is given a limited amount of time. To make the best use of your time, stick to the point. For instance, give the doctor a brief description of the symptom, when it started, how often it happens, and if it is getting worse or better.

### 3. Be honest with your doctor

It is tempting to say what you think the doctor wants to hear, for example, that you smoke less or [eat a more balanced diet](#) than you really do. While this is natural, it's not in your best interest. If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, it's important to come out to your doctor, as people who are LGBT have unique health needs. Your doctor can suggest the best treatment only if you say what is really going on. For instance, you might say: *"I have been [trying to quit smoking](#), as you recommended, but I am not making much headway."*

### 4. Share your point of view about the visit with your doctor

Tell the doctor if you feel rushed, worried, or uncomfortable. If necessary, you can offer to return for a second visit to discuss your concerns. Try to voice your feelings in a positive way. For example, you could say something like: *"I know you have many patients to see, but I'm really worried about this. I'd feel much better if we could talk about it a little more."*

### 5. Remember, the doctor may not be able to answer all your questions

Even the best doctor may be unable to answer some questions. Most doctors will tell you when they don't have answers. They also may help you find the information you need or refer you to a specialist. If a doctor regularly brushes off your questions or symptoms as simply a part of aging, think about [looking for another doctor](#).

#### Four tips to help you remember the doctor's instructions

No matter what your age, it's easy to forget a lot of what your doctor says. Even if you are comfortable talking with your doctor, you may not always understand what he or she says. So, as your doctor gives you information, it's a good idea to check that you are following along. Ask about anything that does not seem clear. For instance, you might say: *"I want to make sure I understand. Could you explain that a little more?"* or *"I did not understand that word. What does it mean?"*

Another way to check is to repeat what you think the doctor means in your own words and ask, *"Is this correct?"* Here are some other ideas to help make sure you have all the information you need.

- **Take notes.** Take along a notepad and pen and write down the main points, or ask the doctor to write them down for you. If you can't write while the doctor is talking to you, make notes in the waiting room after the visit. Or, bring an audio recorder along and (with the doctor's permission) record what is said. Recording is especially helpful if you want to share the details of the visit with others.
- **Get written or recorded materials.** Ask if your doctor has any brochures, DVDs, or other materials about your health conditions or treatments. For example, if your doctor says that your blood pressure is high, he or she may give you brochures explaining what causes high blood pressure and what you can do about it. Ask the doctor to recommend other sources, such as [websites](#), disease management centers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies that may have written or recorded information you can use.
- **Talk to other members of the health care team.** Sometimes, the doctor may want you to talk with other health professionals who can help you understand and carry out the decisions about how to

manage your condition. Nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, and occupational or physical therapists may be able to take more time with you than the doctor.

- **Call or email the doctor.** If you are uncertain about the doctor's instructions after you get home, call the office. A nurse or other staff member can check with the doctor and call you back. Ask if they have an email address or online health portal you can use to send questions.

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