

# 8 Tips for Your Next Medical Appointment

Preparing for medical appointments can be daunting! These tips will offer you guidance on what to do before, during, and after your doctor visits to get the most out of your upcoming appointments. Use these to ensure you leave your next appointment with all your questions answered and every need addressed in the time you have with your doctor.

## **Before the visit**

### **1. Purpose and planning an appointment**

Medical appointments can occur for a variety of reasons. When making the appointment, it can be helpful to know the purpose behind the visit to best prepare for the discussion. Is this a routine checkup? Are there new or changing needs? Concerns affecting safety? Are life changes being considered? Knowing the ‘why’ behind your visit to the doctor will ensure you ask the right questions to get the answers you need.

It is also important to share with the scheduling assistant any special needs, such as language interpretation or mobility-based limitations, requiring extra space or support. Request and complete any paperwork that may be needed and ensure the office has the correct insurance and contact information before your appointment.

### **2. Preparing for the visit**

It is useful to organize you or your loved one’s current needs and symptom information, prioritize your concerns, and develop questions you would like to discuss with the medical provider in advance. Your time with the provider is limited – having a game plan can help the visit be as productive as possible for everyone involved. Focus on quality of information over quantity of information. What are the most important issues to

address? Find the balance between having enough information to feel comfortable, confident, and informed without becoming overwhelmed.

When describing concerns, detail is extremely important. When it comes to a symptom or a patient need, organize your thoughts with consideration of severity, frequency of occurrence, duration, potential triggers, what makes it worse, what makes it better, etc. For those living with Lewy body dementia (LBD), the **LBDA Symptoms Checklist** can be a helpful tool to identify and address symptoms of LBD with your medical provider.

Consider bringing a list of current medications being taken. Include anything taken over the counter, vitamins, supplements, etc. It is important that you voice if medications are not being taken as directed, for any reason.

Review vetted information, such as videos and publications, before your visit to help define questions for the medical provider. Find valuable resources on Lewy body dementia for those **living with LBD**, healthcare **professionals**, the latest in LBD **research, caregiving**, and avenues of **support** on our website.

Bringing a support person to the appointment can be helpful to take notes, help remember what was discussed, maintain priorities within the appointment, offer direct care support, or offer support through challenging conversations.

## **On the Day of Your Visit**

### **3. Be on time for your appointment.**

Try to arrive at your appointment early or, if applicable, make sure you know how to connect virtually prior to your appointment. Bring something to do if there is a brief wait – having something entertaining or productive to do will help the time pass quicker.

### **4. Discuss your agenda**

At the start of the appointment, share your concisely written notes about priorities and the most prominent issues to address during your meeting. Allow the provider to share their priorities for the visit as well. Be honest with your provider – leaving out or sharing incorrect information can affect their ability to address these issues effectively. It may be difficult to admit certain habits or experiences, but sharing allows for the doctor to address symptoms most effectively, providing the best possible plan for treatment.

## **5. Take notes**

Many practices have updated their recordkeeping to electronic medical records and providers are now often asked to balance conversation and documentation during their visits. It is important to be aware of the doctor's requirements in this space but feel comfortable advocating for your needs when you feel that you need more focus and face-to-face communication.

Bring along paper or a tool for electronic notetaking during the visit. Having a second person there for support can be useful in ensuring you gather all the information you need. Ask for clarification if you do not understand or have questions about something mentioned during the appointment.

If the visit is ending with priorities or questions still unaddressed, ask if there is time to continue the discussion during this visit or if feedback could be provided in other ways. This may include electronic communication through a patient portal, a follow-up visit, or connection to others on the healthcare team such as the provider's affiliated nurse, social worker, or other health professionals such as a physical therapist, palliative care provider, or mental health counselor.

## **6. Next steps**

Clarify what your next steps are. Ask your doctor if there will be changes or updates to medications. If so, ensure you understand all instructions, potential side effects, and

expectations. If you are addressing a new diagnosis or symptom there may be additional information provided, potential treatments discussed, or specialist referrals.

The provider may offer publications or videos they think may be of use to you. They may also provide a summary of the visit, alongside any orders for medications, follow-up testing, schedules for next appointments, and other pertinent information.

## **After Your Visit**

### **7. Re-organize**

Once home, confirm that any recommendations, specialists, or medications needed are covered by your insurance. If not, reach out to your physician for further directions. Make sure any follow-up testing or referrals are scheduled and mark these dates in your calendar. Include the next appointment that you will have with the provider you just saw.

### **8. Follow the plan**

Follow your physician's plan and, if this becomes impossible, make the physician aware of the situation. Continue emphasizing adequate movement, sleep, diet, socialization, and stress levels in daily life. The combination of successful physician visits and maintaining healthy practices can have an incredible effect on overall health.

Doctor appointments can be difficult, but with the proper preparation, you can avoid unnecessary stress and get the most out of your visit. These tips will help you and your doctor work together more effectively during the time you have together.