

Communication With Your Doctor

*“...for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;
for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;”*
Proverbs 1: 2-3

Have you ever left your doctor’s office, and wondered what he or she was talking about, or wished you had asked more questions? Good communication between doctors and their patients is essential to your health, and yet too many patients feel uncomfortable “bothering” the doctor with their questions or fears. But think about this; would the average consumer be too uncomfortable to a plumber or contractor to explain what the problem is and how they propose to fix it? Getting the whole picture from your doctor is really no different. You go to the doctor for information and choices, and it’s important that you receive and **understand** all the facts so you can make an informed decision regarding your health.

You are the customer, and you are paying for a service. However, more important than the customer-provider relationship, is the fact that a strong, trusting relationship is the basis of good medical treatment and good health.

Below are some helpful tips that can be of use to all of us.

1. If you don’t understand—ASK. Medical jargon is confusing, so ask for an explanation in plain language. Doctors and nurses often lapse into “medical speak” without even realizing it. Don’t hesitate to stop them and remind them to use more understandable terms.
2. The anxiety and confusion of a doctor’s office can make us forget some of the things we wanted to discuss with our physician, so **bring a list**. It is a simple way to help you and your doctor focus.
3. Give the doctor **all** the information he needs to help you—this includes symptoms, medications, allergies, and major stressors in your life. The loss of a job or illness of a loved one can have a major impact on your health. Don’t forget any over the counter medications or herbals, as some of them can interact with prescription drugs. As little as a baby aspirin a day can cause uncontrolled bleeding after a surgery, so remember that all the pills you take must be disclosed.
4. Tell the doctor if you are feeling rushed, and think about making your next appointment for a time that isn’t as busy. My favorites are the first appointment of the day, or the first one after lunch.
5. When your doctor is explaining something, try repeating it back to him to make sure you understand, or take notes while you are there.

You may have to be assertive and really take charge of your own health care to get the results you want, but the effort is worth it. You may even have to search for a different doctor—one

who gives you the time and information you need to truly understand your own health status. A good way to find a doctor that is a good fit for you is to ask friends and relatives about health care providers with whom they are happy.

Don't be afraid to tell your doctor and nurses what you would like so you can all work together toward one goal: **Better Health!**

For more information, check out:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/talkingwithyourdoctor.html

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.pdf