



PATIENT SAFETY FACT SHEET

What to Ask Before Your Appointment

Patients who ask questions and take an active role are happier with their care and see more improvement in their health than patients who do not. Time is limited during doctor visits. Prepare for your appointment by thinking about what you want to do during your next visit. Do you want to:

- Talk about a health problem?
- Get or change a medicine?
- Get medical tests?
- Talk about surgery or treatment options?

Write down your questions to bring to your appointment. The answers can help you make better decisions, get good care and feel better about your health care. You can also ask someone to go to your appointment with you to help you understand and remember answers to your questions. It's also a great idea to create a health history that includes your current conditions and past surgeries or illnesses.

During Your Appointment

During your appointment, make sure to ask the questions you prepared before your appointment. Start by asking the ones that are most important to you.

Asking questions is important but so is making sure you hear and understand the answers you get. Take notes. Or take someone to your appointment to help you understand and remember what you heard. If you don't understand or are confused, ask your doctor to explain the answer again.

It is important to understand the plan or next steps that your doctor recommends. Ask questions to make sure you understand what your doctor wants you to do. The questions you may want to ask will depend on whether your doctor gives you a diagnosis; recommends a treatment, medical test, or surgery; or gives you a prescription for medicine.



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Questions could include:

- What is my diagnosis?
- What are my treatment options? What are the benefits of each option? What are the side effects?
- Will I need a test? What is the test for? What will the results tell me?
- What will the medicine you are prescribing do? How do I take it? Are there any side effects?
- Why do I need surgery? Are there other ways to treat my condition? How often do you perform this surgery?
- Do I need to change my daily routine?

After Your Appointment

After you meet with your doctor, you will need to follow his or her instructions to keep your health on track. Your doctor may have you fill a prescription or make another appointment for tests, lab work or a follow-up visit. It is important for you to follow your doctor's instructions. It also is important to call your doctor if you are unclear about any instructions or have more questions. Call your doctor:

- If you experience any side effects or other problems with your medicines.
- If your symptoms get worse after seeing the doctor.
- If you receive any new prescriptions or start taking any over-the-counter medicines.
- To get results of any tests you've had. Do not assume that no news is good news.
- To ask about test results you do not understand.

Your questions help your doctor and health care team learn more about you. Your doctor's answers to your questions can help you make better decisions, receive a higher level of care, avoid medical harm and feel better about your health care. Your questions can also lead to better results for your health.