Making the Most of Visits with Your Doctor

Talking with a doctor or other health care professional is stressful for most people. It is a good idea to organize your information and questions before your visit. Here are some suggestions that will help you make the most of any medical care visit.

Preparing for the Visit

- Write down questions before you plan to see your doctor. Underline or highlight the major problems you want to talk about. Keep this information organized in a folder or notebook.

- Try to be specific when describing your symptoms or problems. Notes may help you. For example, if you have headaches, tell the doctor when you get them, how long they last, if you get dizzy, etc.

- Bring along information and dates about your personal health history. This could include procedures, tests, surgeries, medicines and health conditions.

- Come ready to talk about all remedies you use for your health or to control an illness. Your health care professionals need to know about all treatments you use. Here are examples of remedies that should be discussed:
  - Vitamins, supplements
  - Special nutrition

More on next page ➔

Learn more about your health care.

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- Herbal remedies
- Massage or touch therapy
- Movement or dance
- Meditation, guided imagery
- Biofeedback, hypnosis
- Counseling, psychotherapy
- Non prescription medicines
- Any other self help therapies

- Most doctor visits are 10 to 15 minutes long. This means you will need to be organized to ask questions that you want to know.

- Bring a friend or family member to help listen and take notes. It is easy to forget much of what is talked about during an office visit. This is often true if information is given that was not expected.

- Bring something along to do during waiting time. Make a plan for your absence from work or home in case you have an unexpected delay.

- Bring all the medicines you are taking (prescription and over the counter) in their original containers.

- Ask for copies of recent scans and reports you have had, and bring them along.

**During the Visit**

- Let the doctor know how much or how little you want to know. If you don't want or need pictures and detailed explanations, say so.

- If you want to know the details, tell the doctor you want as much information as you can find. Ask for references on the subject and check the library for information. Write or call local offices of organizations related to your illness for information. You might call or visit OSU Medical Center's Library for Health Information (see note below.)
• Don't be embarrassed to ask your doctor to explain medical words in simple terms until you are sure you understand. Pictures may help to make ideas clearer.

• Ask questions such as:
  ▶ What signs should I watch for?
  ▶ How can I help myself?
  ▶ What are the side effects of this treatment?
  ▶ What may I expect in the future?
  ▶ How might this affect my ability to . . .?

• Repeat anything important that has been said to help you remember.

• Make certain that you:
  ▶ Understand what you are to do at home. Get written instructions if needed.
  ▶ Know what medicines you need to take, and how and when to take them.
  ▶ Remember to ask the doctor to give you prescriptions for your medicines.
  ▶ Ask about changes in your diet that you should follow.
  ▶ Find out if there are changes in activity or exercise that you should do.

• Be assertive, not aggressive, about asking questions. If the discussion gets off the topic, bring it back to your concerns. If the doctor is called out of the room while you are talking, remind him or her of what you were talking about. For example, "Just before the interruption, we were talking about a problem I am having with . . ."

**Points to Consider**

• Remember that there are some questions that your doctor cannot answer. There are unknowns.
• As a patient, you have choices. You may get a second opinion. You may ask about changing the treatment plan. If you and the doctor cannot communicate well, you may change to a different doctor.

**Related Materials:** Ask for "Information for my Doctor or Health Care Provider"

- Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.