

Talking with My Providers

You and your health care providers share a very personal relationship. Doctors need to know a lot about you, your family, and your lifestyle to give you the best medical care. And you need to speak up and share your concerns and questions. Clear and honest communication between you and your doctor can help you both make smart choices about your health.

Begin with some preparation. Before your health exam, make a list of any concerns and questions you have. Bring this list to your appointment, so you won't forget anything.

What questions should I ask myself before my visit?

Ask yourself:

- Do I have a new symptom?
- Have I noticed side effects from my medicines?
- Do I want to know the meaning of a certain word?

How do I talk with my doctor more effectively?

1. Don't wait for the doctor to bring up a certain topic, because they may not know what's important to you. Speak up with your concerns. Even if the topic seems sensitive or embarrassing, it's best to be honest and upfront with your health care provider. You may feel uncomfortable talking about sexual problems, memory loss, or bowel issues, but these are all important to your health. It's better to be thorough and share a lot of information than to be quiet or shy about what you're thinking or feeling. Remember, your doctor is used to talking about all kinds of personal matters.

2. Consider taking along a family member or friend when you visit the doctor. Your companion can help if there are language or cultural differences between you and your doctor. If you feel unsure about a topic, the other person can help you describe your feelings or ask questions on your behalf. It also helps to have someone else's perspective. Your friend may think of questions or raise concerns that you hadn't considered. Your doctor may also want someone else to describe what happens when you have a seizure, since you may not remember all of the details.

3. Many people search online for health information. They use internet-based tools to research symptoms and learn about different illnesses. But you can't diagnose your own condition or someone else's based on an internet search.
 - Ask your doctor to recommend specific websites or resources, so you know you're getting your facts from a trusted source. Federal agencies are among the most reliable sources of online health information.

4. Many health care providers now use electronic health records.
 - Ask your doctor how to access your records, so you can keep track of test results, diagnoses, treatment plans, and medicines. These records can also help you prepare for your next appointment. At Michigan Medicine, you can do all of this by signing up for the health portal at www.myuofmhealth.org.
 - Sometimes all of your records may not be available electronically and your doctor may ask you to get a copy of your records from another office or hospital. If you have a test or scan, it may help your doctor to receive the actual test from you (not just the written report of the results). For example: having the photos of your brain MRI put onto a disc (CD) and mailing it to your doctor's office.
 - After your appointment, if you're uncertain about any instructions or have other questions, call or email your health care provider. Don't wait

until your next visit to make sure you understand your diagnosis, treatment plan, or anything else that might affect your health.

Your body is complicated and there's a lot to consider, so make sure you do everything you can to get the most out of your medical visits.

Tips for your doctor visit:

- Write down a list of questions and concerns before your exam.
- Consider bringing a close friend or family member with you.
- Speak your mind. Tell your doctor how you feel, including things that may seem unimportant or embarrassing.
- If you don't understand something, ask questions until you do.
- Take notes about what the doctor says, or ask a friend or family member to take notes for you.
- Ask about the best way to contact the doctor (by phone, email, etc.).
- Remember that other members of your health care team, such as nurses and pharmacists, can be good sources of information.

Adapted from:

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