

How to be an Empowered Patient

Ground rules for better communication with your doctor:

1. **Communication preference:** Ask your doctor how she/he prefers to communicate between appointments if questions arise (Patient Gateway, email, phone call, other).
2. **When is it appropriate to contact my doctor?** Ask your doctor what situation would warrant contact between appointments, or mention concerns that you think might come up between appointments to find out who would be the best person to assist you, and in what way.
3. **Know your clinical team members:** Get to know the other practitioners and staff at your doctor's office. Although your doctor is the key member of your clinical team, there are other supportive team members accessible to you. Ask your doctor to introduce you to these people, or make an effort to introduce yourself and get to know these people. (**The team might include:** Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Residents, Fellows, Interns, Psychosocial providers, Research staff members, Administrative Assistants)

Topics to consider when you are preparing for your next appointment:

1. How am I feeling physically since my last appointment? (better? Worse? No change?)
2. How am I feeling emotionally since my last appointment? (better? Worse? No change?)
3. If you only have time to have 1 question answered by your doctor at your next appointment, what would you ask? (What is most important to you, and the most pressing?)
4. What (if anything) would you like your doctor to help you with in addition to discussing your lab work and medications?

When appointment time is limited:

1. **One main goal for each appointment-**Remember to prepare for your appointment and keep in mind one goal you would like to share with your doctor above all. It might be pain reduction, or sleep issues, or medication side effects that are causing you trouble. Choose the top issue, and share this with your doctor first.
2. **One next step/goal for each appointment-**What is one area of your health you want to work on between appointments? Maybe this is related to your one goal, like implementing gentle exercise in a pool to help you move with more ease and less pain, or maybe it involves finding foods that will compliment your treatment plan and help you feel better.
3. **Ask for contacts** to other practitioners and services that will enhance the treatment plan your doctor has established for you. This may be a referral to other clinicians or psychosocial providers who can provide the additional support you might need.

Check list of questions to ask your doctor (and/or team of practitioners)

**Pick and choose the most important and pertinent questions for you.
Remember there may only be time for you to discuss 2-3 questions with your doctor.**

1. How does my medication work?
2. When will it start to work?
3. How will I know it is working?
4. How often should I take the medication?
5. Can you please spell the name of the medication you are recommending so I can write it in my notebook?
6. Will the medication interfere with other medications I am taking or any food?
7. Are there any complications related to taking this medication that I should be aware of?
8. What should I do if I miss a dose?
9. Are there any side effects from this medication?
10. What should I do if I experience side effects?
11. Are there other treatment plans available to me? If so, what are they?
12. What can I do in addition to following the treatment plan you have given me to increase my overall health?
13. What eating plan is recommended for me to maximize the effectiveness of my treatment and stay healthy?
14. What physical activity plan is recommended for me to maximize the effectiveness of my treatment and stay healthy?
15. What can I do to minimize feelings of depression?
16. If I change one lifestyle habit which would you suggest I choose?
17. Are there things I can do at home or in my life to reduce my pain and increase my chances of feeling better?
18. What (if anything) can I do (that we haven't already discussed) to proactively improve my quality of life?
19. What other recommendations can you make that we haven't already discussed?
20. Where can I learn more about living well with my disease?