

# How to Talk to Your Doctor

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



**W**aiting in your doctor's office can make you feel nervous, impatient or even scared. You might worry about what's wrong with you. You might feel annoyed because you're not getting other things done. Then when you see your doctor, the visit seems to be so short. You might have only a few minutes to explain your symptoms and concerns. Later that day, you might remember something you forgot to ask. You wonder if your question and its answer matter. Knowing how to talk to your doctor, nurse or other members of your health care team will help you get the information you need.

## Tips: What to Do

- **List your questions and concerns.** Before your appointment, make a list of what you want to ask, and then share the list with your doctor or nurse.
- **Describe your symptoms.** Say when these problems started. Say how they make you feel. If you know, say what sets them off or triggers them. Say what you've done to feel better.
- **Give your doctor a list of your medications.** Tell what prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products and other supplements you're taking.
- **Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history.** Not sharing information with your doctor or nurse can be harmful!
- **Describe any allergies to drugs, foods, pollen or other things.** Don't forget to mention if you are being treated by other doctors, including mental health professionals.
- **Talk about sensitive topics.** Your doctor or nurse has probably heard it before!
- **Ask questions about any tests and your test results.** Get instructions on what you need to do to get ready for the test(s). Ask if there are any dangers or side effects. Ask how you can learn the test results. Ask how long it will take to get the results.
- **Ask questions about your condition or illness.** If you are diagnosed with a condition, what caused it? Is it permanent? What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can it be treated?
- **Ask your doctor about any treatments he or she recommends.** Be sure to ask about all of your options. Ask how long the treatment will last. Ask if it has any side effects. Ask how much it will cost. Ask if it is covered by your health insurance.
- **Ask your doctor about any medicines he or she prescribes for you.** Make sure you understand how to take your medicine. What should you do if you miss a dose? Are there any foods, drugs or activities you should avoid when taking the medicine? Is there a generic brand of the drug you can use?
- **Bring a family member or trusted friend with you.** That person can take notes, offer moral support and help you remember what was discussed.
- **Call before your visit to tell them if you have special needs.** If you don't speak or understand English well, the office may need to find an interpreter. If you have a disability, ask if they can accommodate you.