

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

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We know that communication is probably one of the most single important functions we have as human beings. We need to communicate to friends and loved ones, which gives us great pleasure, and we communicate with business and emergency services for our well being. The same should hold true for doctors. Communication helps nurture relationships and statistics have shown that patients are much more satisfied if they can communicate with their doctor. Sometimes the communication is one-sided in the form of the doctor telling the patient what to do, but the best case scenario is when the patient interacts and is proactive, allowing the patient and doctor to become partners in his or her health care. It is very important that patients take an active role in decision making about their health care delivery system.

You can sit patiently and wait for the doctor to ask the right questions, but don't wait to be asked if you have something specific to say. Tell the doctor what you think he or she needs to know and is important. This is true even with delicate and personal matters. Don't be embarrassed or feel uncomfortable if it is a touchy issue, particularly if you feel it is related to the problem that you are seeing your physician for. You never know how important it is until it is discussed. It may greatly affect the outcome of your response and care.

Past medical history, all surgeries and hospitalizations, no matter how minor are important for the doctor to know, as well as your medications, regardless of whether they are herbal, nature, alternative, over-the-counter or prescription. You want to make sure that you discuss any possible interactions or allergies.

It is not just your job to provide information. You need to get information from your doctor, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Please make sure that you understand everything that is told to you. If you don't understand something, ask the doctor to repeat it. If you get home and are confused, call the doctor back and have him or his nurse review his recommendations and/or treatments, or if necessary, schedule a second visit. Communication is an important link. The best medicine in the world will not work if you do not take it correctly, and a worse case scenario is that you could get even sicker. Being proactive includes writing down your questions before you go to your visit and taking notes during your visit. Do you remember the old saying, "Two heads are better than one"? In this case it applies as well. Bring somebody along that you trust so this person can help you understand and remember what transpired during your office visit.

Take-home information is always very helpful. Most offices have pre-printed information about diseases, procedures, medications, etc. Your doctor may even have audio and/or video tapes available for you. If that is not the case, ask him for a reliable source through your library or on-line. Most reputable medical societies such as the AMA, the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, to mention a few, have wonderful resources on-line and in the form of printed materials. It is your body. Take good care of it.

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