

# 4 Easy Steps

Get the most out of your appointment and understand the information you are given!



## 1. Get organized for your appointment.

- Buy a notebook for visits with your doctor. If you have more than one doctor, add section dividers to it.
- Keep everything you want to discuss at your next appointment in the section for the appropriate provider.
- If you experience a new health problem since your last appointment, write down information about it and bring the information to your appointment. Your doctor needs to know when the problem started, how long it lasted, and how it felt. You can also record this information in your notebook like a daily log.
- Make a list of significant changes in your health that have interfered with your daily routine. Think about your food patterns, activity, and sleep.
- Bring all prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal products, protein powders, and nutritional supplements in their original containers to the appointment in a bag.
- If you are a new patient, bring a copy of your family health history that shows the chronic diseases for at least two generations (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings). See **4 Steps – Family Health History**
- If you have visited other health clinics, bring a copy of those records with you, especially if laboratory tests were ordered or medications were prescribed.
- Bring your insurance cards, pictured identification, and updated health records and immunizations.
- Review the After Visit Summary (AVS) written after your last appointment. Print a copy and write questions about what you didn't understand or had trouble doing at home.

## 2. Arrive early for your appointment.

- Arrive at the provider's office 10-15 minutes earlier than the appointment to fill out forms, focus on the appointment, and let your heart rate return to normal.
- If your provider uses a medical word you do not understand, tell them. They are happy to teach you about health and will not make fun of you.
- Ask your provider to slow down if you feel rushed. Ask them to wait until you finish speaking; do not allow them to interrupt when you are asking questions.

- Answer questions honestly. Your doctor needs the information that you know about your lifestyle, history, health beliefs, and preferences. Your doctor cannot share decision-making if you don't participate.
- **Take notes during your appointment.** Write down your doctor's answers to questions and explanations about your health. Consider bringing a supportive friend or family member to your appointments.
- If medical tests or new medications are ordered, **ALWAYS** ask (1) what is their purpose? (2) side effects? (3) risks? (4) costs? Are generic medications available?
- **ALWAYS** ask your provider for easy-to-understand patient education materials (written handouts, videos) to help you learn to manage your health. If they have nothing to give you, ask for a list of reliable sources of information online.
- Ask what you can do to improve your health and quality of life. How can you reduce your health care costs?
- Ask your provider how you can share decision making about your care more effectively.
- Before you walk out the door, ask your physician to summarize the main points of your appointment.

## 3. Know your family health history.

- Many health problems run in families and are inherited from ancestors.
- Families benefit from sharing health information (diseases, disorders, behavioral dysfunction) with one another.
- Family history should be shared and updated with providers so they can use it to provide the best care.

## 4. After your appointment.

- If you have questions when you get home, either call your doctor or send your questions using the patient portal (electronic medical record).
- If you suddenly remember information that will help your doctor provide better care, call when you get home, send the information using the patient portal, or write it down in your notebook for your return appointment.
- If your provider ordered something new for you, such as a medication, take time to learn about it. If you need more information, contact your doctor or pharmacist.
- Report all symptoms and side effects experienced with new medication or treatments immediately.
- Update your Patient Health Record and inform your doctor or their staff when you see mistakes.
- Always contact your doctor to get test results and an explanation of what they mean. Don't wait for your doctor to communicate with you.

### References:

<https://www.kindredhospitals.com/resources/blog-kindred-spirit/2019/01/21/your-complete-checklist-to-prepare-for-doctor-s-visits>

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