

A visit to any health provider can be overwhelming. Use this guide to ensure you have taken the right steps and asked the right questions to get the best care possible.

1) Preparing For Your Visit

- a) Write down your symptoms, problems, questions or concerns, what you remember about their onset, what makes them better or worse, what you've done about them on your own, and how they've affected your activities of daily living and your quality of life.
- b) Do an online search for what you think you might have or your main symptom. It's often true that recently published information hasn't made it to providers, and you may be able to share information with them that they need to help you.

2) During Your Visit

- a) Answer questions from aides, assistants, nurses and providers from what you wrote down ahead of time, and be sure to add anything that occurs to you to make sure you give them as complete a set of information as possible.
- b) Ask what the diagnostic options are. Having your provider explain what they think your problem, concern or condition may be (and why they don't think some options are appropriate) is a good way to have a chance to think more about whether or not there's anything you haven't remembered or reported.
- c) Ask what the treatment options are. There can be a range of considerations from the strengths of drugs, side effects of drugs, conservative or 'natural' approaches, and so on. If you have some ideas or thoughts that the provider doesn't suggest or consider, bring them up and ask, "What do you know of/think about _____?"
- d) Ask what the levels of evidence are that inform their suggestions and considerations. "Evidence" is the kind of information that comes from observation, research, experience, and so on. Some times there is very strong evidence to support a clinical recommendation; some times there isn't strong evidence, even if some options may possibly be very effective.
 - (a) One model of evidence is based on three levels: Level 1 means that there is strong, consistent evidence that something helps; Level 2 means that there is inconsistent or conflicting evidence that something helps; and Level 3 means that there is little or no evidence that something helps.
 - (b) One important question to ask if a prescription is recommended is to ask if the purpose for the drug has been tested and proven, or if it is an 'off label' prescription. There can be some effective 'off label' drug uses, but you should know that if you take a drug for any purpose that has not been tested sufficiently or approved for that purpose.
- e) Ask what levels of safety are for their recommendations. Safety is different than efficacy, and so this is an important question to ask.
- f) Ask what options there are for types of providers. Sometimes western medicine has the best solutions; sometimes other types of providers (including complementary and alternative health care) have the best solutions; sometimes there are several things that can and should be done together.
- g) Ask what optimal outcomes are. What is the range of outcomes you can expect from the suggested course of treatment? What are the warning signs that something isn't working?
- h) Ask what the time frame is for optimal outcomes. Many factors affect healing. Be sure and ask what they think is an appropriate time frame for a good response.

- i) Ask what the range of costs for the suggested treatment might be. Providers don't always know this, but should be able to direct you to business contacts within the organization or clinic to answer this important question.
- j) Ask what you can do to help support healing and health. What kinds of foods or nutrition will help, or hurt? What kinds of exercise? What resting habits? What other things might help (mindfulness, attitude, etc.)?
- k) Ask if, when, and how frequently you should report on your progress. What is important to track and report?

3) After Your Visit

- a) Report on your progress according to your provider's guidance.
- b) Track how your progress is. Keeping a daily diary of symptoms, pain, limitations on activities, etc., can be important if something does not go as it should.