
TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR



Taking an active role in your health care

Leaders Guide

***Presented by Bonnie Teeples and Patti Malanaphy
For
Oregon FCE State Conference 2015***

Developed by NIH National Institute on Aging

Tips for Preparing for the Presentation

When scheduling the presentation, consider:

- What day and time will attract the most attendees? Try to avoid having it at the same time or immediately following another popular activity, especially if you think it will make it difficult for people to arrive on time.

When setting up the room, consider:

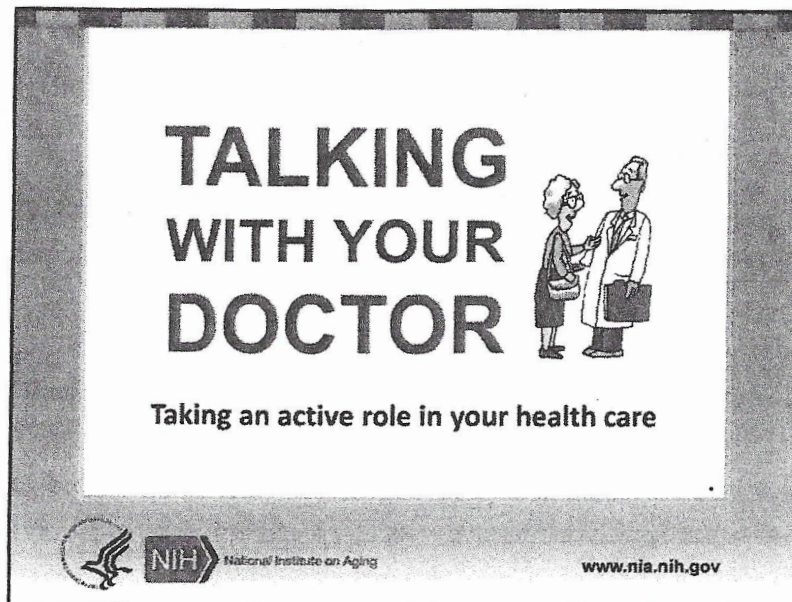
- Do you have the right technology to present the slides (i.e., laptop, projector, screen, power outlet, podium)?
- How much time will you need to set up the technology? Do you have a back-up plan if something like the projector or computer doesn't work?
- Will the room be accessible for people who have difficulty walking?
- Will people be able to see the screen from all seats? Should you print a few copies of the slides in case people can't see the screen?
- Depending on the expected size and preferences of the group, would it be best to have rows of chairs or have people sit around a table?
- Will you need room for an interpreter?

When preparing for and delivering the presentation, consider:

- Do you have a plan for people who are unable to see or hear well or who have difficulty writing?
- What's the best way to distribute the handout packets? Try to hand them out before you get started to avoid taking time away from the presentation itself.
- What will you do if there is not an even number of people for pairing up during the activities?
- How will you keep track of time during an activity?
- Following an activity, how will you reconvene the audience?
- How will you handle questions? Do you want people to ask questions at any time or wait for set breaks in the discussion? Should people raise hands or just call out?
- Remind attendees to turn off or silence their cell phones.

Checklist of items to bring:

- Copy of the speaker notes
- Any equipment for projecting the presentation
- Enough copies of the handout packets for every attendee, plus a few extra for those who want to take an extra to share with a family member or friend
- Pens or pencils for attendees who want to take notes
- Timer or watch to keep track of time for activities and presentation



Speaker Note: Distribute packet of handouts before the presentation begins. You may want to introduce yourself as part of the welcome and introductions.

- First, I'd like to welcome you all to this presentation about talking with your doctor. Today, we'll learn about how you can take an interactive role in your health care. Please note that I am not a doctor and do not have the medical expertise to address individual health concerns or provide medical advice. Our presentation will instead focus on communication tips for getting the most out of your doctor's appointment. Also, while I will use the word "doctor" to describe the health professional, this person could also be a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other type of clinician. The presentation will take about 45 minutes with a couple breaks for short activities.
- Before I get started, I wanted to point out that I have distributed a packet of information to help you recall some of the most important points we will discuss today. Throughout the presentation, I'll refer back to specific handouts in this packet. The handouts are yours to keep.
- The information in this presentation comes from the National Institute on Aging, a Federal agency that is part of the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services. You can visit www.nia.nih.gov for more information on this topic.

Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (2 minutes) Ask group the following question to help them begin actively thinking about the doctor-patient relationship.

- What are some words to describe a good doctor-patient relationship?

Speaker Note: If the audience doesn't call out words, you might try providing a few examples, such as open communication, patience, partnership, honesty, etc.

You're an official partner in your healthcare team



In this role, you will be expected to:

- Ask questions
- Speak up

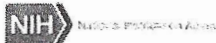


- In the past, the patient-doctor relationship was one-directional—the doctor typically took the lead and the patient followed. Today, a good patient-doctor relationship is a partnership.
- As an active member of your healthcare team, you should:
- **(Click) ASK QUESTIONS!**
 - If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to explain it again.
 - Your doctor may use technical terms and not realize they are unfamiliar or confusing to you unless you say something.
- **(Click) SPEAK UP!**
 - Tell your doctor if something is bothering you, such as a pain in your hip or other symptoms. Don't just wait to see if it goes away.
 - Or, let your doctor know if you're unsure about that surgery and want to hear about other treatment options.
- Taking an active role in your care puts the responsibility for good communication on both you and your doctor.

Easier Said Than Done?

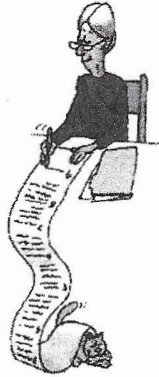
Today, we'll talk about how to:

- Get ready for an appointment
- Share information
- Make decisions with your doctor



- Today, we'll help make it easier to ask questions and speak up by talking about how to:
 - **(Click)** Get ready for an appointment
 - **(Click)** Share information
 - **(Click)** Make decisions with your doctor
- Don't worry about remembering every detail; the information from this presentation can be found in your packet.
- And, we'll have plenty of time for questions.

Activity: What Did You Eat Yesterday?



List everything you ate and drank yesterday, including approximate portion size.



Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (3 minutes) To show how hard it can be to remember every detail and why it's important to write down information/questions before a doctor's appointment.

- Pair up with someone next to you, and take turns sharing everything you ate and drank yesterday, including about how much of each item. After this activity, I'll explain how this relates to talking with your doctor.

Speaker Note: Discussion after activity.

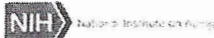
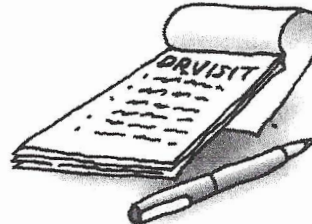
- How easy was it to remember everything? Did you realize that you forgot at least one thing while sharing with your partner? Maybe a piece of candy or the glass of water you drank with your pills?
- It can be hard to remember every detail like that. It's the same at the doctor's office, when you have to remember:
 - Every health issue you've had since your last visit
 - Concerns you want to discuss
 - What medications you take and their dosages
 - What over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements you use
- You might feel under pressure to fit everything in during the short time you have with the doctor. It's easy to see how you might overlook something important.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Getting Ready for a Doctor's Visit."

Getting Ready for an Appointment

Before you go to the doctor:

- Create a plan
 - List and prioritize your concerns
 - Note other health and life changes since your last visit



- There are things you can do to prepare for an appointment so that you have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish and don't forget something important. Most of the tips we'll talk about are for regularly scheduled doctor's appointments rather than for emergency visits.
- **(Click)** Start by listing everything you want to discuss. If you have a new symptom or problem, make notes about:
 - How long the symptom lasts
 - What makes it better or worse
 - How it affects your daily activities
- If possible, start this list at least a week before the appointment, so you have time to add issues you may have forgotten at first.
- Prioritize your list of concerns, and highlight the 3 to 4 most important to discuss first, so that you don't run out of time to bring them up.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Concerns to Discuss."

- **(Click)** Make note of other health and life changes since your last visit, such as:
 - New illnesses, operations, and medical conditions
 - Emergency room or specialist visits
 - Changes in appetite, weight, sleep, or energy level
 - Changes in medications or reactions to medications
 - A recent loss or a move

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Changes to Discuss."

- You can also ask your doctor's office for the medical history form before your visit so that you have extra time to fill out the new information.

Getting Ready for an Appointment

- Gather information to take with you
 - Other doctors' contact information
 - Insurance cards
 - Medical history
 - Medicine (prescriptions, over-the-counter pills, vitamins, supplements, eye drops)



- Take the following information with you to the visit:
 - **(Click)** Names and phone numbers of any other doctors you see, even if you don't see them regularly
 - **(Click)** Your insurance cards
 - **(Click)** If this is your first visit with a new doctor, bring medical records and additional files, charts, test results, or other information from your former doctor. Or, have your new doctor's office contact your former doctor's office to get copies of your medical records. You'll need your old doctor's name and address.
 - **(Click)** Bring a complete list of what you take, along with dose information. Or, put all your pills, drops, vitamins, and herbal remedies or other supplements in a bag and bring them with you; but, be careful not to misplace the bag.
- It's possible for medicines to interact, sometimes causing dangerous side effects. That's why your doctor needs to know about ALL the medicines you take, including:
 - Medicines prescribed by other doctors
 - Things you buy without a prescription, like headache medicine, eye drops, vitamins, laxatives, herbal remedies, and other supplements
- If you experience side effects, do not stop taking your medication without first talking to your doctor.

Speaker Note: Refer to "Keeping Track of Your Medications" chart.

Getting Ready for an Appointment

- Think about what you'll need to see, hear, and communicate during your visit:



- Wear your glasses and your hearing aids
- Consider bringing a family member or friend
- Ask your doctor for an interpreter, if you need one

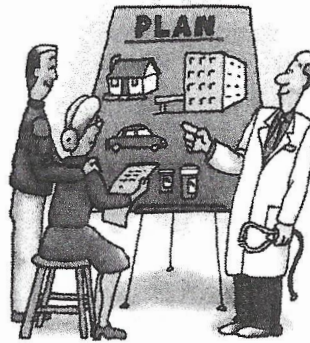
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- So, part of your preparation for a doctor's visit is pulling together your list.
- Another part is thinking about potential obstacles to communicating with your doctor.
- **(Click)** Wear your glasses and hearing aids, and let your doctor know if you have a hard time seeing or hearing. For instance, you can ask your doctor to speak slowly.
- **(Click)** Consider bringing a family member or friend.
 - If you do, bring a person who can take notes and help you remember what the doctor tells you.
 - Make sure this person does not take too strong a role during the visit. You may even want some private time with your doctor to discuss something personal.
- **(Click)** Ask your doctor for an interpreter, if you need one.
 - If possible, explain your concerns to the interpreter before your appointment so he or she can fully understand your situation before telling the doctor.
- Any questions so far?

Speaker Note: Allow a few minutes for questions. If more than 5 minutes of questions, you might suggest that you continue with the presentation to make sure you have time to go through everything and suggest that the group return to the questions at the end.

Set Your Plan Into Action!

Sharing information
with your doctor
during the visit



- You've prepared for your appointment by:
 - Making a list of your concerns in order of their importance to you
 - Writing down your medications
 - Noting all of the changes in your health since your last visit
 - Wearing your glasses and hearing aids as needed
 - Maybe even practicing what you want to discuss with your doctor
- Now you are ready to set your plan into action.
- First, let's do another quick activity.

Activity: Describe the Image

- What do you think is going on in this photo?
- What could this woman be feeling? What might be her symptoms?



Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (1 minute) To help the group understand the importance of being clear and specific when describing health concerns and symptoms.

- Look at this picture.
 - If you had to guess, why do you think this woman is at the doctor's office?
 - What do you think this woman is feeling? What might be her symptoms?
- Feel free to call out your responses.

Speaker Note: Discussion after activity.

- Did you find that you had different ways to describe the same picture? This is a lot like sharing the symptoms of a potential health problem with your doctor. Health issues, like back pain or fatigue, can have different meanings to different people.
- By giving clear descriptions of your symptoms, you're helping your doctor figure out the root of the problem.

Sharing Information with Your Doctor



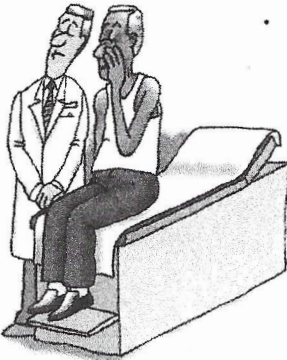
- ❑ Start with your symptoms
 - What are they?
 - When did they start?
 - How often do you have them? All the time or sometimes?
 - What makes them better or worse?
 - How do they affect your daily life?



- When sharing information with your doctor, start from the top of your prioritized list of health concerns.
- Describe your symptoms in a clear and concise way to help your doctor diagnose the problem and decide what to do next.
- Examples might include pain, fever, lump or bump, unexplained weight loss or gain, feeling depressed or sad all the time, problems sleeping, or diarrhea.
- Share with your doctor:
 - **(Click)** What the symptoms are
 - **(Click)** When they started
 - **(Click)** How often you have them
 - **(Click)** What makes them better or worse
 - **(Click)** How they affect your daily life
- Don't assume your symptoms—like pain or fatigue—are just a normal part of aging. The doctor needs to know how you feel.

Sharing Information with Your Doctor

- Go over your medications
- Tell the doctor about your habits
- Voice other concerns



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After discussing your symptoms,

- Go over your medications using the list you created or bag of medications you put together before your appointment.
- Let your doctor know if you've had any drug allergies or reactions. For example, did any medicine make you feel light-headed, interrupt your sleep, or cause constipation?
- Make sure the doctor's office has the contact information for your pharmacy so that they can call in prescriptions. Try to use the same pharmacy for all your medicines prescribed by different doctors. The pharmacy tracks all of this information and can notify you about possibly dangerous drug interactions.
- **(Click)** To provide the best care, your doctor must understand you as a person and know what your life is like. Your doctor may ask you questions about:
 - What you eat/drink
 - How you sleep
 - What activities you do
 - If you smoke or drink
- Think of your doctor's office as a safe place to share information. It's best to tell your doctor the whole truth. Knowing your habits will help your doctor to understand your medical conditions fully and recommend the best treatment choices for you.
- **(Click)** Share any other concerns. For instance, tell your doctor about any major changes or emotional stress in your life, like a move or a recent loss.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Making Good Use of Your Time During a Doctor's Visit."

Doctor-Patient Communication is a Dialogue

-  : You share your health concerns
-  : Your doctor asks questions about your symptoms
-  : You answer the questions
-  : Your doctor shares the diagnosis and treatment
-  : You ask questions to better understand the plan
-  : Your doctor answers the questions

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- You'll GIVE your doctor a lot of information during your visit, but you'll also GET a lot of information. Asking questions about this information is very important.
- Here's how a conversation with your doctor might go. (*Click through slide.*)
- Pay close attention to the last 2 items on this list.
 - The conversation doesn't end after the diagnosis and treatment plan.
 - Ask questions about the diagnosis, any words you don't understand, or instructions that are unclear.
- For example, if a doctor says something about an acute myocardial (my-oh-kar-dee-al) infarction (in-fark-shen), what would he or she mean? (*Pause for response.*)
 - **Answer:** It's a technical term for a heart attack.
- What about if your doctor tells you to take medicine with food? Does that mean before, during, or after a meal? (*Pause for response.*)
 - **Answer:** It depends, which is why it's important to ask plenty of questions!
- Next we'll talk about questions to ask your doctor.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment."

Questions To Ask About Medical Tests

- What will the test tell us?
- What does it involve?
- How should I get ready?
- Are there any dangers or side effects?



- Let's start with questions about medical tests.
- Sometimes doctors do blood tests, x-rays, or other procedures to find out what's wrong or to learn more about your medical condition.
- Some tests are done regularly to check for hidden medical problems, even if you don't have any symptoms.
- Before having a medical test, ask your doctor to explain why it is important, what it will show, and if insurance will cover the cost. If insurance isn't going to pay for it, you can ask who to talk to about the out-of-pocket cost.
- Some questions to ask your doctor before the test are:
 - What will the test tell us?
 - **(Click)** What does it involve?
 - **(Click)** How should I get ready?
 - **(Click)** Are there any dangers or side effects?
- Find out how and when you will get the results. Arrange with your doctor to have the results of the test explained to you, allowing time for questions. If the test is done by a specialist, have the results sent to your primary doctor.

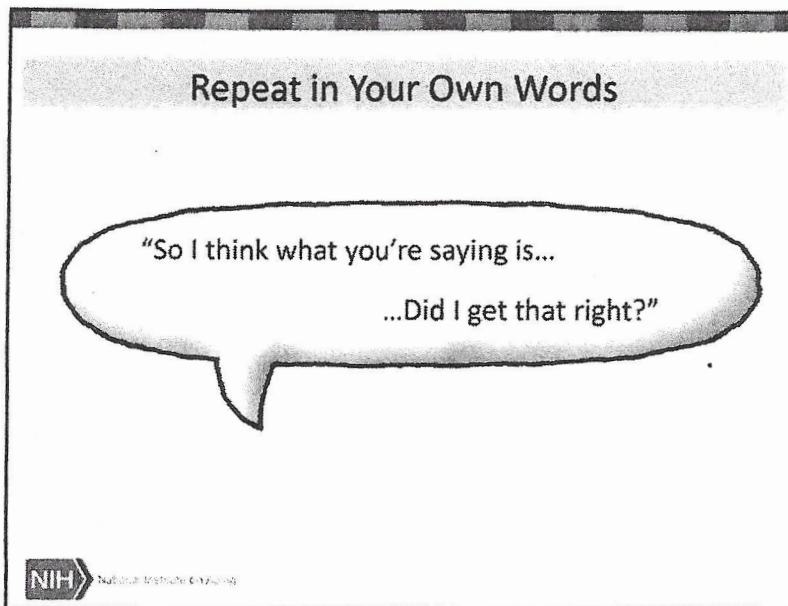
Questions To Ask About Your Diagnosis



- What may have caused this condition?
- How long will it last? Is it permanent?
- How is this condition treated or managed?
- How will it affect me?



- Next, let's consider questions about your diagnosis.
- A diagnosis is what your doctor determines to be your health problem. It's based on your symptoms and the results of your physical exam and other medical tests.
- After the doctor gives you a diagnosis, here are some questions to ask:
 - Why do you think I have this diagnosis? What may have caused it?
 - **(Click)** How long will it last? Is it permanent?
 - **(Click)** How is it treated or managed?
 - **(Click)** How will it affect me?
- Make sure you really understand your diagnosis and its implications. If you don't, have your doctor explain it again.
- Ignoring the diagnosis will not make it go away. Understanding your condition will help you make better decisions about treatment, and knowing what to expect may make it easier to deal with the condition.
- Have the doctor write down the name of the condition and any other relevant information for you. That way, you can refer to it later or share it with others. Ask your doctor if he or she can recommend any resources to learn more about your condition.



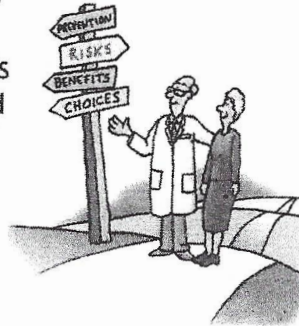
- Have you ever noticed that when you tell your doctor something, he or she repeats it back to you to make sure he or she understood everything correctly?
- That's a great opportunity for you to correct your doctor if he or she has gotten something wrong.
- You can do the same thing when getting information from your doctor. After your doctor tells you something, like your diagnosis or treatment plan, repeat it back in your own words. Do you think that might be helpful?

Speaker Note: Allow 30 seconds for response.

- We just have a few more slides left.

Questions To Ask About Treatment Options

- What are my treatment choices?
- What are the risks and benefits?
- Ask yourself—which treatment is best for me, given my values and circumstances?



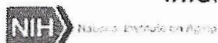
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- Sharing and receiving information are two important steps in doctor-patient communication. A third is to make decisions about your care together.
- Talk about treatment options.
- Ask your doctor about all of the ways to treat your health problem. There may be more than one.
- **(Click)** Discuss the risks and benefits of each one. This includes possible side effects, that is, unwanted or unexpected symptoms of the treatment.
- Also ask about:
 - How likely a treatment might work for you and what exactly it will do
 - Length of treatment and if you will need help from family or friends
 - Whether insurance will pay for the treatment
- Have your doctor give you directions in writing.
- **(Click)** Think about how each treatment will affect your life and ability to do activities you enjoy. Share your concerns, so your doctor can work with you to develop a treatment plan that meets your needs.
- If a treatment makes you uncomfortable, ask if something else might work.
- If your treatment involves getting a prescription, make sure to know what to expect. You can find more specific questions about medications in the handout ***“Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment.”***

Maintaining the Doctor-Patient Partnership

Closing thoughts:

1. Prepare for your appointment by writing down a list of your concerns.
2. Share any changes in your medical history and a complete list of your medicines.
3. Make sure you understand what the doctor is telling you.
4. Take notes or ask the doctor to write down information to help you remember.



- Remember that a successful doctor-patient relationship is a partnership.
- To recap some highlights from our presentation today, as an active member of your healthcare team:
 1. Prepare for your appointment by writing down a list of your concerns.
 2. **(Click)** Share any changes in your medical history and a complete list of your medicines.
 3. **(Click)** Make sure you understand what the doctor is telling you.
 4. **(Click)** Take notes or ask the doctor to write down information to help you remember.

Speaker Note: Refer to remaining handouts in the packet—“Remembering What the Doctor Says” and “Health and Aging Information Resources”—which contain more helpful information. There are also questions about prevention in the “Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment” handout.

- This brings me to the end of the presentation.

Speaker Note: Ask a few questions to generate discussion and highlight some major points from the presentation:


- Did you find anything particularly helpful?
- Any tips you plan to try during your next appointment?
- Anything surprising or something you hadn't thought about before?
- Does anyone have questions about talking with your doctor?

Speaker Note: If questions remained from earlier in the talk, you might want to reengage those people, asking them to share their question(s).

For More Information

Want more free information about health and aging?

Contact:

 National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov
1-800-222-2225

Talking with Your Doctor:
Taking an interactive role in your health care
May 2014

- For additional information on *Talking with Your Doctor* and other free resources from the National Institute on Aging:
 - Visit the website www.nia.nih.gov and click “Publications” on the top of the screen.
 - There you can download or print your own copy of the *Talking with Your Doctor* booklet.
 - You can also find a variety of other information on health and wellness, including materials about exercise and physical activity, making healthy food choices, quitting smoking, and other behaviors that can help you feel better and prevent or manage specific medical conditions.
 - Or, if you don’t want to go online, you can call the National Institute on Aging Information Center toll-free at 1-800-222-2225 to speak to an Information Specialist.

TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR



Taking an active role in your health care

Participants Guide

Presented by Bonnie Teeples and Patti Malanaphy

For

Oregon FCE State Conference 2015

Developed by NIH National Institute on Aging

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Getting Ready for a Doctor's Visit

A basic plan can help you get the most out of your medical appointment:

- ✓ **Make a list of your concerns and prioritize them** — Do you have a new symptom you want to ask the doctor about? Do you want to get a flu shot? Are you concerned about how a treatment is affecting your daily life? If you have more than a few items to discuss, put them in order. Start with the ones most important to you.
- ✓ **Plan to update the doctor** — Let your doctor know what has happened to your health since your last visit. If you have been treated in the emergency room or by a specialist, tell the doctor right away. Mention any changes in your appetite, weight, sleep, energy level, vision, or hearing. Also tell the doctor about recent changes in medications you take or their effects on you.
- ✓ **Take information with you** — Bring a list of all your prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal remedies or supplements, including the dose. Or, put them all in a bag and bring them with you to your appointment. Also take your insurance cards, the names and phone numbers of your other doctors, and any medical records your doctor doesn't already have.
- ✓ **Make sure you can see and hear as well as possible** — If you use eyeglasses and/or a hearing aid, wear them at the doctor's visit. Let the doctor and staff know if you have a hard time seeing or hearing. For example, you may want to say: *"My hearing makes it hard to understand everything you're saying. It helps when you speak slowly."*
- ✓ **Consider bringing a family member or friend** — If you bring a companion to the appointment, tell him or her in advance what you want from your visit and if you'd like some alone time with your doctor. Your companion can remind you what you planned to discuss with the doctor if you forget, take notes during the visit, and help you remember what the doctor said.
- ✓ **Plan for an interpreter if you know you'll need one** — Arrange with your doctor's office for an interpreter before your visit. Make sure the interpreter clearly understands your symptoms and/or condition, so the information is accurately communicated to the doctor. Let the doctor, your interpreter, or the staff know if you do not understand your diagnosis or the treatment instructions.

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Concerns to Discuss

This form can help you organize your concerns, symptoms, or other health matters that you'd like to discuss with your doctor. Make a copy of the blank form so you will always have a clean copy to use. Then, after you make an appointment, take a minute to write down the name of the doctor and the appointment details (the date, time, address). Use the form to make a list of the concerns you want to discuss, starting from most important to least important.

Doctor: _____ **Appt. Date:** _____ **Time:** _____

Address: _____ **Phone:** _____

Appointment Details (most important to least important)	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
Notes	

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Changes to Discuss

Your doctor may want to know about changes in your health and life since your last visit. This chart can help you organize your thoughts. Not all the things on this list will apply to you. Make a copy of the blank list so you will always have a clean copy to use. Then take a minute to think about each of these possible topics. Try to jot down a date for when you first noticed a change and note any additional information that may be helpful for the doctor to know.

Topic	Date	Notes
Your diet, medication, and lifestyle		
Alcohol use		
Appetite changes		
Diet/nutrition		
Medicines		
Tobacco use		
Weight changes		
Your health		
Bone/joint pain or stiffness		
Bowel problems		
Chest pain		
Dizziness or lightheadedness		
Headaches		

Topic	Date	Notes
Hearing changes		
Hospitalizations or recent emergencies		
Shortness of breath		
Skin changes		
Urinary problems or feeling wet		
Vision changes		
Your thoughts and feelings		
Intimacy issues or changes in sexual activity		
Loneliness or feeling isolated		
Memory problems or trouble thinking		
Sadness or feeling down		
Everyday living		
Accidents, injuries, or falls		
Advance directives		
Daily activities		
Driving/transportation/mobility		
Exercise		
Living situation		
Sleep problems or changes in sleep patterns		

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Keeping Track of Your Medicines

This chart can help you keep track of the different medicines, vitamins and over-the-counter drugs you take. Because your medications may change over time, make a copy of the blank form so you will always have a clean copy to use. Try to bring a completed and updated copy of this form to every doctor appointment.

Date: _____

Name of Drug	What It's For	Date Started	Doctor	Color/ Shape	Dose (How Much/ How Often)	Instructions



For more resources on health and aging, visit: www.nia.nih.gov/health

May 2014

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Making Good Use of Your Time During a Doctor's Visit

- ✓ **Be honest** — It is tempting to say what you think the doctor wants to hear, like you have stopped smoking or are eating a more balanced diet. This is natural, but it's not in your best interest. Your doctor needs all the facts to suggest the best treatment for you. For instance, you might say: *"I have been trying to eat fewer sweets, as you recommended, but I am not making much headway."*
- ✓ **Decide what questions are most important** — Pick three or four questions or concerns that you most want to talk about with the doctor. You can tell him or her what they are at the beginning of the appointment, and then discuss each in turn. If you have time, you can then go on to other questions.
- ✓ **Stick to the point** — Although your doctor might like to talk with you at length, there is only a limited amount of time for each patient. To make the best use of your time, give the doctor a brief description of the symptom, when it started, how often it happens, and if it is getting worse or better.
- ✓ **Share your point of view about the visit** — Tell the doctor if you feel rushed, worried, or uncomfortable. If necessary, you can offer to return for a second visit to discuss your concerns more fully. Try to voice your feelings in a positive way. For example, you could say something like: *"I know you have many patients to see, but I'm really worried about this. I'd feel much better if we could talk about it a little more."*
- ✓ **Remember the doctor may not be able to answer all your questions** — Even the best doctor may not have answers to some of your questions. Your doctor may be able to help you find the information or refer you to a specialist. If a doctor regularly brushes off your questions or symptoms as simply a part of aging, think about looking for another doctor.

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment

Medical Tests

- ✓ What will the test tell us?
- ✓ What does it involve?
- ✓ How should I get ready?
- ✓ Will insurance pay it? If not, how much will it cost?
- ✓ Are there any dangers or side effects?
- ✓ How and when will I find out the results? Can I get a copy?

Your Diagnosis

- ✓ What may have caused this condition?
- ✓ How long will it last? Is it permanent?
- ✓ How is this condition treated or managed?
- ✓ How will it affect me? What might be the long-term effects?
- ✓ How can I learn more?

Treatment Options

- ✓ What are my treatment choices?
- ✓ What are the risks and benefits?
- ✓ Ask yourself—which treatment is best for me, given my values and circumstances?

Medications

- ✓ When will it start working?
- ✓ What are common side effects?
- ✓ Will I need a refill? How do I arrange that?
- ✓ Should I take it with food? What time of day should I take it?
- ✓ Should I avoid anything while taking it?
- ✓ What if I miss a dose?

Prevention

- ✓ What can I do to prevent a health problem from developing or getting worse?
- ✓ How will changing my habits help?
- ✓ Are there any risks to making this change?
- ✓ Are there support groups or community services that might help me?

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Remembering What the Doctor Says

No matter what your age, it's easy to forget a lot of what your doctor says. Here are some ideas to help make sure you have all the information you need.

- ✓ **Take notes** — Take along a notepad and something to write with, and jot down the main points, or ask the doctor to write them down for you. If you can't write while the doctor is talking to you, make notes in the waiting room after the visit. Or, bring a tape recorder along, and (with the doctor's permission) record what is said. Recording is especially helpful if you want to share the details of the visit with others.
- ✓ **Make sure you understand** — It is hard to remember a diagnosis or instructions about a treatment that you don't understand. Ask about anything that does not seem clear. For instance, you might say: "*I want to make sure I understand. Could you explain that a little more?*" or "*I'm not familiar with that word. What does it mean?*" Another way to check is to repeat what you think the doctor means in your own words and ask, "*Is this correct?*"
- ✓ **Get written or recorded materials** — Ask if your doctor has any brochures, fact sheets, DVDs, CDs, cassettes, or videotapes about your health conditions or treatments. For example, if your doctor says that your blood pressure is high, he or she may give you brochures explaining what causes high blood pressure and what you can do about it. Ask the doctor to recommend other sources, such as websites, public libraries, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies that may have written or recorded information you can use.
- ✓ **Talk to other members of the healthcare team** — Sometimes the doctor may want you to talk with other health professionals who can help you understand and carry out the decisions about how to manage your condition. Nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, and occupational or physical therapists may be able to take more time with you than the doctor.
- ✓ **Call or email the doctor** — If you are uncertain about the doctor's instructions after you get home, call the office. A nurse or other staff member can check with the doctor and call you back. You could ask whether the doctor, or other health professional you have talked to, has an email address you can use to send questions.

Tips for Talking With Your Doctor

Health and Aging Information Resources

Here is a sampling of resources that may be helpful. You may find more information through the Internet, home medical guides, books and articles available at libraries, national organizations or associations, other institutes within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and self-help groups.

National Institute on Aging (NIA) Resources

NIA Information Center

P.O. Box 8057
Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057
1-800-222-2225
1-800-222-4225 (TTY)
www.nia.nih.gov/health
www.nia.nih.gov/espanol

NIA has free information in English and Spanish, both online and in print publications. Check out NIA's booklet *Talking With Your Doctor: A Guide for Older People*. Visit NIA's website to find these resources and to sign up for email alerts about new information.

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

1-800-438-4380
www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

NIA's ADEAR Center offers referrals and free information about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, including fact sheets and other publications.

NIHSeniorHealth.gov

This website from NIA and the National Library of Medicine, both a part of the National Institutes of Health, is designed specifically for older people. It features a wide variety of popular health topics presented in a simple-to-use, easy-to-read format. It also has short videos and a button to make the type larger.

Go4Life®

www.nia.nih.gov/Go4Life

NIA's online exercise and physical activity campaign, **Go4Life®**, features a sample workout, exercise videos, motivational e-cards, printable tip sheets, success stories, online tracking tools, and more.