

How To Be More Involved In Your Healthcare

Research shows that patients who are more involved with their medical care tend to get better results. That means taking part in decisions about your healthcare by communicating problems and asking questions of your doctor. Here are some ways you can do just that:

MEDICATIONS

- **Communicate with your doctor about what you are taking.**
Make sure that all of your doctors know about every medication you are taking, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs. At least once a year, bring all of your medicines and supplements with you to your doctor.
- **Tell your doctor about allergies and adverse reactions to medications.**
Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines. This can help you avoid getting a medicine that can harm you.
- **Make sure you can read your prescriptions.**
When your doctor writes you a prescription, make sure you can read it. If you can't read your doctor's handwriting, your pharmacist might not be able to either.
- **Ask for information about your medicines in terms you can understand.**
When your doctor prescribes medicines and when you receive them, ask questions like: *What is the medicine for? How am I supposed to take it, and for how long? What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur? Is this medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements I am taking? What food, drink, or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?*
- **Make sure you get the right medicine and know how to take it.**
When you pick up your medicine from the pharmacy, ask: *Is this the medicine that my doctor prescribed?* If you have any questions about the directions on your medicine labels, ask. For example: Ask if "four doses daily" means taking a dose every 6 hours around the clock or just during regular waking hours. Ask about the best way to measure your liquid medicine; household teaspoons, for example, often do not hold a true teaspoon of liquid.
- **Ask for written information about the side effects your medicine could cause.**
If you know what might happen, you will be better prepared if it does—or, if something unexpected happens instead. That way, you can report the problem right away and get help before it gets worse.

HOSPITAL STAYS & SURGERY

- **Choose your hospital if you can.**
If you have a choice, choose a hospital at which many patients have the procedure or surgery you need.
- **Be clear on exactly what is to be done during surgery.**
If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done. Doing surgery at the wrong site (for example, operating on the left knee instead of the right) is rare, but even once is too often. The good news is that wrong-site surgery is 100% preventable.
- **Understand what to do when you are discharged.**
When you are being discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan you will use at home. This includes learning about your medicines and finding out when you can get back to your regular activities.

OTHER STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- **Speak up if you have questions or concerns.**
You have a right to question anyone who is involved with your care.
- **Make sure that someone, such as your personal doctor, is in charge of your care.**
This is especially important if you have many health problems or are in a hospital.
- **Ask about handwashing.**
Whether you are in a doctor's office or a hospital, consider asking all healthcare workers who have direct contact with you whether they have washed their hands. Handwashing is an important way to prevent the spread of infections.
- **Do not assume that everyone knows everything they need to.**
Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have important health information about you.
- **Ask a family member or friend to be there with you.**
Sometimes it helps to have someone with you to be your advocate. Especially when you are hospitalized, you may need someone who can help get things done and speak up for you if you can't.
- **Know that "more" is not always better.**
It is a good idea to find out why a test or treatment is needed and how it can help you. You could be better off without it.
- **Ask about test results.**
If you have a test, don't assume that no news is good news.
- **Learn about your condition and treatments.**
Ask your doctor or nurse about your condition and treatments, and use other reliable sources to become better informed. For example, treatment recommendations based on the latest scientific evidence are available from the National Guidelines Clearinghouse at <http://www.guideline.gov/>.



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