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## Healthy Insights

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### Are You Getting the Most Out of Your Doctor's Appointment?

How long do you spend speaking to your doctor? A study conducted by Health Services Research found that the median primary care doctor's appointment visit length was 15.7 minutes during which a median of six topics were discussed. That's a lot to cover in a brief window of time, but with the right preparation and planning, you can successfully get the information you need at your next doctor's visit. Here's how...

#### Plan in Advance

Before going to your appointment, write down three topics you'd like to go over with your doctor. Consider what is most important and concerning to you, whether that be symptoms you're experiencing or feelings you're having. To make it simpler, come up with three to four questions you'd like answered before the end of your visit (read more on this in the next section).



Use the National Institute on Aging's worksheets (linked in the Sources section) to help you talk about topics including:

- Your family health history
- Your lifestyle changes
- Concerns you'd like to prioritize
- Medications you're currently taking

#### Ask the Right Questions

Sometimes, doctors talk about topics that are hard to understand. Asking for the meaning of a word or for the doctor to repeat instructions could help. Here are some more tips:

- Before a medical test, ask why the test is important, what it will show, how you should prepare for it, when you'll receive results, and if you should expect any side effects. You may want to ask your doctor about the risks, benefits, and costs of tests and treatments they are suggesting and ask for additional preventative measures to take.
- If you are diagnosed with a condition, asking what may have caused it, if it will improve, its treatment and management, and its long-term effects will help you manage your health.

- When discussing medications, remember to ask how often and for how long you should take them. If you are unable to afford the cost of your medication, ask if there is a less expensive alternative or generic version, or if the manufacturer offers any programs to make the medication more affordable.

### When the Date Comes

Now that we've discussed what you should do before the appointment, it's time to go over what you should do during it. To start off, make sure you stick to the point and keep your descriptions short, but accurate.

Tell your doctor when your symptoms started, how often they occur, and if they've gotten worse or better since your last appointment. Also, review your lifestyle and habit changes. Share all of the medications you're currently taking so your doctor has a full view of your health status. If you are having trouble hearing your doctor, ask them to face you and speak slowly. After your visit, request written material that you can take home to review what you've learned.

### Some Subjects are More Difficult Than Others

Part of receiving a complete check-up includes talking about challenging topics. Some of these include alcohol use, driving, falling and fears of falling, grief, mourning, depression, bladder control issues, memory problems, family issues, and sexuality. You may feel like your doctor doesn't want to hear about these subjects, or you could feel embarrassed to discuss them. Even if you feel this way, being completely honest with your doctor is the way to go. Remember, they might not be able to answer all of your questions, but they can give you additional information or refer you to a specialist. If you feel rushed,

uncomfortable, or worried during your appointment, you may be unhappy with your doctor. Consider asking for a follow-up telephone call, virtual visit, or email. If you continue to feel unhappy with your healthcare provider, consider looking for another professional whose communication style is more comfortable for you.



### Sources

**Talking With Your Doctor Worksheets** | NIH NIA | <https://bit.ly/4dBOast>

**How To Talk With Your Doctor About Sensitive Issues** | NIH NIA | <https://bit.ly/41ZeuWh>

**Five Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Doctor's Visit** | NIH NIA | <https://bit.ly/4tCn1u1>

**What Should I Ask My Doctor During a Checkup?** | NIH NIA | <https://bit.ly/4mnzGid>

**Time Allocation in Primary Care Office Visits** | National Library of Medicine | <https://bit.ly/4t6umIT>

*IPRO Healthy Insights* comes from Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.



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