

Making the Most of Your Medical Appointment

Adapted from Clear Cane Chronicles: Shaping the Future of Healthcare Through Person-Centered Care

Better healthcare depends on informed questions, engaged communities, and decisions that reflect people's needs.

Prepare Before Your Appointment

This guide helps you prepare for medical appointments by sharing your context, asking informed questions, and leaving with a care plan that fits your life.

- Think about what you want to accomplish during the appointment.
- Document new or changing symptoms, when they began, and what makes them better or worse.
- Write down your questions before you arrive.
- Bring an up-to-date list of your medications, supplements, allergies, and medical conditions.
- Bring something to take notes with, or ask someone to take notes for you.
- Consider bringing a trusted family member or friend to support you.

During the Appointment

Sharing information about your life can help your provider recommend a care plan that works for you.

Your Healthcare Provider Knows... Information About Your Life Helps Your Provider...

- Your diagnosis: Tailor your care to what matters most to you.
- Available treatment options: Recommend a plan that fits your goals and daily life.
- Potential benefits and risks: Align recommendations with your priorities.
- What the suggested plan requires: Identify and address barriers before they become problems.
- Tests, treatment, or follow-up: Understand barriers like cost, transportation, and scheduling.
- Treatment goals: Measure success based on your health goals.

Questions That Matter

Consider the questions that are relevant to your situation.

About My Condition

- What do you think is causing my symptoms?
- What other conditions are being considered?
- What should I watch for?
- What might make you change your diagnosis or treatment plan?

About My Treatment

- Why are you recommending this treatment?
- What are the benefits and risks?
- Are there alternatives?

- How can this plan be adapted to fit my individual circumstances?
- How will we know whether the treatment is working?

About My Next Steps

- What do I need to do next?
- When should I follow up?
- How will I receive my test results?
- Who should I contact if I have questions or problems?
- What should I do if this plan isn't working for me?

Make Sure You Understand

- Your diagnosis and what is still being evaluated.
- Why tests, medications, or treatments are recommended.
- Expected benefits, possible risks, and common side effects.
- What you are expected to do next.
- Who is responsible for scheduling tests, referrals, or follow-up appointments.
- How and when you will receive test results.
- Warning signs that require medical attention.
- Who to contact if questions arise after the appointment.
- What to do if the treatment is not working or you experience side effects.

Leave with a Plan You Can Follow

Before leaving your appointment, explain the plan back in your own words to confirm you understand it.

After your appointment, review your after-visit summary. If it does not match what you understood or contains incorrect information, contact your healthcare team.

Closing

Healthcare for people who live in the real world, not in a medical chart.

The best care plans consider both medical evidence and the realities of your daily life.

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This guide reflects the U.S. healthcare system and is a living document that continues to evolve.