

## How to Make the Most of Your Doctor Visit

Preparation is important for any doctor appointment whether it be the first visit or return visits. The patient has the responsibility to think about and to prepare for the visit. Consider the following question:

- Why am I seeing the doctor?
- Who referred me to this doctor?
- What symptoms am I experiencing and need to tell the doctor?
- What concerns do I have related to these symptoms?
- When do my symptoms occur?
  - What time of day?
  - After Activity?
  - Before or after meals?
- Am I experiencing pain?
  - How severe: on a scale of 1-10
  - How often
  - How long does it last
  - Where is it located
- What do I expect from this doctor visit?
- If you find it difficult to remember what you want to tell the doctor or what you want to ask, write the information down and bring it with you.
- When scheduling a first time appointment, ask what they are expecting you to bring.
- Is a referral required from a primary care physician?
- Bring copies of old medical records
  - X-rays, CT scans, or MRI films
- Discuss the method of payment
- Know your medical history.
  - Bring a prepared written history or if the doctor sends a history form to complete, keep a copy for yourself.
  - Bring the names, addresses, and phone numbers of **ALL** the doctors who are treating you.
  - Bring a list of **ALL** medications you are currently taking dose and frequency. This includes eye drops, aspirin, over the counter medications and vitamins. Be sure to know any medicines, dyes, and/or foods you are allergic to and the type of reaction they cause.
  - It is sometimes helpful to know which medicines you have been on in the past and why they were stopped.
- Have your health insurance information with you. The office will probably want to make a copy of your insurance cards.
- If the doctor you are seeing diagnoses a new problem, be sure to ask the doctor to explain it to you. Have him/her write it down so you know what it is, how to spell it, and can discuss it with your family. Perhaps you will want to do some reading on the diagnosis.

- Ask what sort of symptoms you can expect.
- Ask what the various treatment options are and what kind of response you can expect to the treatment proposed.
- Don't be afraid to ask if someone else can come in and listen to the doctor's explanations with you. They can come in either before or after the exam. Both of you can ask questions. If you think you won't remember the answers, take notes.
- Ask if there is any written literature on your diagnosis that you can take with you.
- Ask where you can get additional information, education, and supportive services. If the doctor prescribes a new medication, be sure to ask about it.
  - When should you take it?
  - Before or after meals
  - With food or on an empty stomach
  - All at one time or in divided doses
  - In the morning or at bedtime
  - Will it interfere with other medicines you take
  - What type of reaction should you expect?
  - What are the possible side effects
  - How long will you be on this medication?
  - Does it need to be refilled?
- If you are visiting the doctor on a return visit, some things you should be prepared to do are:
  - Relate any concerns you have about the diagnosis.
  - If you need prescriptions refilled, be sure to ask for them. It is helpful if you have a list prepared with the name of the medicine, the dosage, and how you take it. (Some patients bring the bottle(s) with them.)
  - If you are on a special prescription plan please be sure that you tell the doctor BEFORE he/she writes the prescription because it may be limited to the number of pills or refills that may be prescribed.
  - If the doctor put you on a new treatment, medicine or therapy during your previous visit, be prepared to explain how you feel it has or has not helped your condition.
  - If you have seen another doctor since the last visit, explain this to the doctor you are currently seeing. Be sure to mention any new medications you may be taking as well.
  - If your address, phone number, or insurance has changed, be sure to notify the office staff with the new information.

**REMEMBER!** If your insurance is through a **MANAGED CARE PLAN/ HMO**, you **MUST** have a referral for every doctor you see or test that is scheduled unless it is being done by your primary care physician. If you fail to do this, you may be responsible for complete payment of the charges.

By taking the responsibility to get the most from your doctor visit you will be better able to understand the diagnosis and treatment and what to report and expect in the future. A more thorough understanding of your diagnosis and treatment should result in better health care.