



# Maintaining Effective Communication With Your Provider



Honest and thorough communication with your doctor is necessary to ensuring you're getting the right treatment. The better you are at communicating with your doctor, the more you will be able to get out of the relationship, and the better care you will receive.

## Follow these tips to keep the lines of communication open with your doctor:

- **Relax and try not to stress.** While it can be worrisome to have a medical diagnosis, try to focus on the appointment and make the most out of the face-to-face time with your doctor. You will feel better knowing the (often limited!) time you have with your doctor was spent wisely.
- **Ask your doctor if you don't understand the reason he or she is prescribing a medication or test.** It's important that you are an educated health consumer, and that means speaking up if you need clarification on what care is being ordered for you. Your doctor will want you to feel comfortable with the treatment plan that is decided on, and if you don't fully comprehend that plan, that's not possible.

- **Tell the truth about symptoms you are experiencing.** If you aren't honest about your condition, your doctor won't know the full extent of your symptoms and thus won't be able to accurately treat you. Doctors appreciate your honesty and that goes a long way with helping them format a successful treatment plan. As well, sharing information about your health— both emotional and physical— helps to enhance understanding between you and your doctor.
- **If you feel like your doctor is talking over your head, stop them and ask for clarification.** Don't hesitate to tell your doctor you don't understand something they are explaining. Doctors are only human and may not always know when they haven't explained something carefully or have glazed over something that may be important to you. You shouldn't feel embarrassed or shy about asking your doctor to explain something more clearly. If you're confused, repeat back what your doctor has said and double check that you understand it correctly. You can also ask if he or she can provide you specific reading materials about your condition.
- **Know what to expect after your visit.** Before you leave the office, make sure you understand your doctor's instructions for next steps. Do you need to go to the pharmacy to pick up your new medication? Does your doctor expect you to follow up with a specialist? Ensure you are clear on the next steps so you can feel confident you are following your doctor's plan of care. It's also a great idea to ask how your doctor likes to communicate in between appointments. Do they prefer messages in the patient portal or should you call their office? What is the typical response time to messages? Clarifying upfront about how to contact them with questions or concerns can save a lot of frustration.
- **Make sure you're holding up your end of the bargain.** You'll want to stick to the plan that you and your doctor agreed upon. If there are reasons that you can't (maybe the medication your doctor prescribed is causing unwanted side effects you can't handle, or if you have denied against going through with a test or procedure) it's imperative to let your doctor know so both of you can reassess the best treatment plan.
- **Don't be afraid to find another doctor if you aren't happy with the care you are getting.** A relationship with a doctor is like any relationship, and you need to feel that it's the right one for you. If something about the arrangement doesn't feel right, that's worth paying attention to. After all, your doctor is supposed to be your trusted advocate. If you are unsure about how to find another doctor, give your insurance company a call and they can help with the process of finding someone in your plan's network.

**Statistically, patients that are actively engaged in their treatment decisions, with their providers as partners in their health, have better outcomes. Being a more assertive, informed patient is a great first step toward better health. While your doctor has medical knowledge and experience, you know your body better than anyone else. You should work to establish and maintain a partnership with your doctor. After all, you are there for the same goal- for you to have a healthy life!**