



# It Matters

## *Empowerment Pathways*



## **How to Make the Most Out of Your Doctor's Appointment**

While going to the doctor is no one's favorite activity, there are things you can do to maximize your time as well as your provider's time and expertise. With most physicians' visits now averaging around 20 minutes or less, it is more important than ever to be organized and focused while face-to-face with your provider.

### **BRUSH UP ON YOUR FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY**

While it's most important to know the health histories of your immediate family members, it can be invaluable to learn about your extended family members' health histories as well. Did Aunt Lois experience frequent migraines too? If you can provide your doctor with this additional information about the familial context of your health, it can help your doctor diagnose or choose the best course of treatment for you.

### **MAINTAIN A SYMPTOM DIARY SO YOU CAN TELL YOUR DOCTOR**

Before your diagnosis, you were probably told how important it is to keep a headache journal. It's still true even if you have experienced migraines for many years. The purpose of a headache journal is to help you recognize trigger behaviors or factors, or warning signs of headaches. As well, it can help you and your doctor assess if your acute or preventative medication is working. It's helpful to include things in your journal like when the symptoms started, where the pain is and the type of pain, if there is aura or other symptoms, how long the attacks last, as well as any treatments you take and their effectiveness. As well, it is helpful to take a few minutes before the appointment to see if you notice any trends or patterns in your condition.

## **KEEP A SMALL NOTEBOOK HANDY SO AS YOU THINK OF QUESTIONS, YOU CAN EASILY JOT THEM DOWN**

Maybe even keep a notebook in your car too. That way, all your thoughts are organized when you get in front of your physician and you can become more engaged in the appointment. Being prepared with your questions will allow you to be fully present in the appointment so you aren't sitting there trying to remember what you wanted to discuss.

## **HOWEVER, IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE REALISTIC**

From your list, pick out the three most important issues and focus on those. Since your appointment time is likely to be limited, there is no feasible way your doctor is going to be able to address 25 concerns in-depth, or with the quality you expect. Your doctor may have a few things he or she would like to discuss with you as well, so keep that in mind. If there are additional concerns you feel strongly about addressing, make sure you schedule a follow-up appointment or ask if you can email your questions through your patient portal, so they aren't forgotten.

## **MAKE SURE YOUR PHYSICIAN KNOWS ALL THE MEDICATIONS YOU'RE TAKING**

It's vital your doctor knows all the medications you are taking, even if they are over-the-counter herbals or supplements. Some over-the-counter herbs or vitamins can interact with prescribed medication or alter their effectiveness, so double-check that your doctor knows everything you take regularly. Also, many doctors suggest bringing the actual medication bottles with the original labels to ensure there were no pharmacy errors in dispensing. At the very least, you should bring a complete list with the medication names, dosage, frequency, and purpose of the medication to reconcile with your physician.

## **IF YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE, BRING A LOVED ONE**

It can be helpful to have a second set of eyes and ears during an office visit. Having a friend or family member present at the appointment with you is a great idea because they can listen (and may catch things you didn't!) or help take notes while you are focused on the examination.

Consider this preparation as an investment in your health. Patients who help their doctors by providing important health information and organize themselves for appointments tend to get better care than patients who don't. Plus, a good doctor will encourage your desire to understand as much as possible about your condition and treatment plan and will welcome you as an active participant in your care.