Be Prepared!

How to get the most out of your doctor visit

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Keep a Running List.

Between visits, use a pad of paper or your smartphone to keep a list of all nonemergency questions about your health. (“Should I take vitamin supplements?” “Is this fatigue from my meds?”) That way, you’ll maximize your time once you’re face to face with your doctor—and you won’t forget stuff to ask about. But also keep in mind that a good care provider should be available promptly if you have urgent issues or queries.

Assess Yourself Before Your Visit.

How have you been feeling? Depressed? Anxious? Not sleeping well? In any pain? Have you been missing doses of your meds? Are you drinking too much, doing drugs or smoking cigarettes? Be honest with yourself about what’s going on so you can be the same with your doctor. It’s the only way he or she can really help you.

Don’t Be Afraid to Ask Questions.

“Can you explain that to me?” “Why do you think that’s serious?” “Why do you want me to do that?” “Are there side effects linked to that medication?” “Can I think about that a little?” Your doctor may be busy, but you have the right to ask questions—even follow-up questions—and to state your needs, concerns and fears. A good doctor, even a busy one, will hear you and reply in kind. A doctor who just shuts you down could mean it’s time to look for a new one, if you can. But if you can’t, polite but firm statements like “I am really worried about this” or “This is important to me” can go a long way.

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