



Shape Your Relationship With Your Doctor

Feeling comfortable bringing up concerns is important.

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The relationship between you and your doctor can be not only unique and meaningful but also essential to good health. A good rapport involves trust, vulnerability and loyalty. People put their trust in doctors to guide them with their knowledge, and doctors trust people to be truthful.

This relationship can play out in several ways. Some patient-doctor relationships are characterized by inequity, with doctors wielding power and patients being forced to comply. Others, however, involved equal participation. In these cases, the doctor and the patient are on equal footing and both types of knowledge—taught and experienced—are respected.

A [2015 study](#) noted that patient-doctor communication often affects health outcomes. Opening up to your doctor about all aspects of your treatment is essential to good care, but it can be scary, especially because, as previously mentioned, the relationship requires vulnerability.

“Having side effects, or experiencing anything like that with treatment, is a moment for a person to reflect on their relationship with their doctor,” says Kris Bungay, MD, an internist at NYU Langone, to POZ. “You should feel comfortable saying whatever you need to say and to be proactive about your health.”

In fact, at least [one study](#) has shown that people have better health outcomes when doctors are trained in relationship strategies.

“A good relationship fosters better communication, which improves diagnosis,” according to John Kelley, PhD, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, as quoted in Harvard Health. “It also encourages people to tell their doctors about symptoms they might not otherwise disclose.... Clinicians work for you, and it’s perfectly fine to bring up any concerns. Just as in any relationship, be tactful in how you bring up concerns. If this discussion does not result in an improvement in the clinical relationship, you can certainly seek out another clinician with whom you can form a closer bond.”

While having a good relationship is important, know that it is not up to you to fix a relationship with your doctor that is not working for you.

“If the relationship is challenged or failing,” researchers wrote in 2015, “physicians should be able to recognize the causes for the disruption in the relationship and implement solutions to improve care.”

As with any relationship, success requires work on both sides. If you want honesty from your doctor, you must be honest with them, including about how your treatment is going and on whether the relationship is working for you. Just know that you have a hand in making sure the relationship succeeds.

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