



Tips on Preparing for a Doctor's Appointment

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Going to a doctor's appointment can be stressful. It helps me if I prepare for the doctor's appointment before I go. Here are some tips on information that you need to get together before you go to the appointment.

- **Gather your insurance information.** You need to bring your insurance card with you to your appointment. The receptionist will make a copy of this card. This card has information that tells the doctor's office staff who is responsible for paying the bill for your appointment. Some people have more than one type of insurance. For example, you might have private health insurance and Medicare. If you have more than one type of insurance, knowing which health insurance is your "primary insurance," the insurance the doctor's office bills first, is important. Be sure and bring all of your insurance cards with you to the appointment.
- **Make a list of your medications.** The doctor needs to know all of the medications that you are taking. Write down the name of the medication and the number of the milligrams that you take. Also, write down how often you take it. You can find all of this information on the medication bottle. It is also a good idea to write down the reason that you take the medication. This is helpful to the doctor because some medications are used to treat more than one condition. Also, be sure and include on your list any vitamins or herbal supplements that you take.
- **Think about your health history.** Take some time to think about your health history and what you need to tell the doctor about your health history. Have you had any major surgeries? Have you been hospitalized? Have you been treated for any other serious medical conditions? Write down when these events happened so that it is easier to remember to tell the doctor.
- **Think about your family's health history.** Doctors often ask about your family's health history. Knowing your family's health history will help the doctor treat you. This is because if someone in your family has an illness, then you may be at higher risk for it. If you are at higher risk, then the doctor can monitor, or check you over time, for that illness. It is much easier to think about this before you go to the appointment. Has anyone in your family had a major



illness, such as cancer, diabetes, or heart disease? It is okay if you do not know the answer to these questions. If possible, you might want to ask a parent or other relative if they know about your family's health history. Be sure and write down what you find out, and bring it with you to the appointment.

You have prepared for the appointment, and now you are at the doctor's office. Here are some tips about the information that you want to get from your doctor during the appointment.

- **Take notes during the appointment.** It is hard to remember everything that the doctor says, so it is important to write it down. Don't be afraid to ask the doctor to stop for a moment so that you can take notes.
- **Ask questions about prescriptions.** If the doctor suggests a new medication, ask questions about it. What is the prescription for? How long does it take to start working? How will you know when it is working? Are there any side effects that you should know about? How much of the medication are you supposed to take? How often do you take it? What does the doctor want you to do if you have a problem with the medication? How much does the medication cost? Will your insurance pay for the medication? Be sure and get all of your questions answered about the medication before you leave the doctor's office.
- **Ask questions about tests.** If the doctor wants you to have a medical test, make sure that the doctor tells you all about it. What is the test for? What kind of information does the doctor think the test will provide? Will your insurance pay for the test? If the insurance will not pay for the test, how much will it cost? What does it feel like to take the test? Does it take a long time? You have the right to know these things before deciding whether or not to have the test.
- **Get copies of your medical records.** You have the right to get copies of your medical records if you want to read them. You will have to sign a release to get the records, and you will have to pay to have them copied. If you have questions about your records, then you can always ask for a copy.

Resources: See "KASA Surviving a Doctor's Appointment" and "KASA Keeping Track of Health Care Information," both available on the KASA website.