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## Preparing for a health or medical appointment

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### Summary

- It may help to write down a list of your symptoms so you can tell your general practitioner (GP) or other healthcare professional during your visit.
  - You may like to write down your medical history and lifestyle activities so you can talk about these with your GP or other healthcare professional.
  - Prepare a list of questions you want your GP or other healthcare professional to answer. These might be about your illness or condition, treatment options or tests you need.
  - If you are unsure how to talk about your health issue, it can help to practise what you want to say.
  - Prepare the things you need to take to your appointment, such as your Medicare card, scans or test results.
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Some people find it hard to talk about their health problems with their general practitioner (GP), nurse or other healthcare professional. They may become nervous and flustered, get distracted or forget to mention symptoms. By preparing for your visit and writing down things like your symptoms, medical history and a list of questions, you'll remember what you want to talk about with your healthcare professional, including all the questions you want to ask.

### How to prepare for a healthcare visit

Whether you are preparing for a visit to doctors and other healthcare professionals in a community health centre, private clinic or hospital, there are some things that you can do to get the most out of your visit.

#### Think about your medical history

Think about your medical history and write down:

- the list of topics you want to talk about
- any concerns or things that you think are unusual about your health
- any recent medical appointments, admissions to hospital, treatments or visits to other doctors or healthcare professionals
- a list of the medication you're taking, how much you take, how often, and if there have been any recent changes (or bring all your medications with you, in their original packaging if possible)
- a list of any over-the-counter medication, vitamins or herbal supplements you take
- any allergies you have
- any related tests or scans you have had, for example, an x-ray (and bring these with you if you have them)
- your family health history.

#### Record your symptoms

If you have any symptoms, write down:

- when they started
- what time of the day they happen and how long they last
- how often they happen
- anything you've done that makes them better or worse
- if they stop you from doing anything.

#### Include your lifestyle activities

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Write down information about your lifestyle, such as:

- your diet
- your physical activity
- how much alcohol you drink
- whether you smoke (and how much)
- sleeping patterns and any sleeping aids you may use
- life events or situations that may be causing you stress.

### **Other treatments you are having**

To give your GP or other healthcare professional an overview of your healthcare, make a note of any other treatments you're having, such as physiotherapy, counselling, acupuncture or naturopathy.

### **Any special needs you have**

If you need an interpreter or have other special needs, such as needing wheelchair access, let the receptionist know when you book your appointment.

### **Ask questions and discuss your health**

It may help to make a list of any questions you have and put the most important questions at the top. A list will help you to remember the questions you want to ask your GP or other healthcare professional, particularly if you are feeling stressed about your diagnosis.

Once you are with your GP or other healthcare professional, be ready to have an open, honest discussion. Open communication is a two-way process. Remember, everything you talk about with your GP or other healthcare professional is private and confidential.

It is important to talk with your GP or other healthcare professional about any health-related issues such as drug or alcohol use and any risky behaviour you may do.

Some people feel uncomfortable asking their GP or other healthcare professional to explain things they don't understand. If this is the case, you may want to ask a family member or friend to come with you to the consultation for support, to take notes and help you to remember things, or to ask questions on your behalf.

### **Practise what you want to say**

If you have to talk about something that makes you feel uncomfortable, it can help to practise the things you want to say and the questions you want to ask.

Practising what you want to say may help you to feel less nervous or embarrassed. It may also comfort you to know that your GP or other health professional has been trained to talk about sensitive issues.

### **What to take to your appointment**

Put together a checklist of things you might need to bring for your visit, including:

- your Medicare card
- your pension card or healthcare card, if you have one
- details about your private health insurance, if you have it
- your medical records and test results, unless they have been sent ahead
- the names and contact details of other healthcare providers you see
- a notebook and pen
- your notes, including questions to ask
- a list of your medication or the medication itself
- a letter of referral from another doctor, if you have one
- your glasses and hearing aid, if you use them

- something to eat or drink if you are likely to have to wait for a long time
- a book or some other form of entertainment to pass the time while you wait.

### **Where to get help**

- Your GP
- Your healthcare professional

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Department of Health and Human Services

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