

Talking with your doctor

Getting the most out of your conversation with your doctor, nurse or other health professional

health

Commission for Hospital Improvement



Getting ready to visit your doctor

When you phone to make an appointment (or when you first arrive at hospital), let the receptionist know if you need an interpreter. They will arrange for one. A professional interpreter can help make sure you and your doctor understand each other clearly.



- If you specifically require either a male or a female doctor tell the receptionist when you make your appointment or arrive at hospital.
- Use a notebook to write down the reasons for your visit and any questions before you arrive.
- You can bring someone with you if you want to. A friend or family member can comfort you, speak on your behalf if you want them to and they may remember important information that you don't.
- Remember to wear clothes that can be easily removed if required.

What to take with you

- A pen and notebook – use the same notebook for all appointments.
- A list of all your medicines.
- Your Medicare card.
- Glasses and/or hearing aids if you use them.



‘Talking with’ means you being open about providing information and speaking up when you don’t understand something or think it’s ‘not quite right’. A good conversation is a dialogue where your concerns, aspirations and values become part of the agreed plan.

During your visit – sharing information with your doctor

Be ready to have a discussion. The information you give about yourself, your concerns and your situation is important. Your doctor will be glad you've spoken up.

Tell your doctor about

- Your symptoms and how long you've been having them.
- What you are concerned about and think is unusual. Don't assume it's normal.
- Medical appointments or treatments you have had since your last appointment (such as visits to emergency, other health professionals or doctors).
- All medications (including over-the-counter medicines), vitamins or herbal remedies you may already be taking or just started to take.



What else you can do

- Ask for a print out of your prescriptions if your medications are changed.
- Ask your doctor about what you can do to avoid getting sick next time and not just about how to get better this time.

If you're in hospital it's always OK to ask what the medication you are being given is for, or to question the dose, and if there are any other alternatives.

During your visit – making decisions with your doctor

Confirm your understanding

Ask your doctor to explain:

- any treatments they suggest
- other available treatments
- how the treatment will help you and if there are any risks or side effects
- how much time you have to make a decision about the treatment.



Repeat back the doctor's advice or instructions. Saying it back in your own words will ensure you have understood everything. If you haven't, the doctor will be glad to explain things again.

Consider your options

Let the doctor know your preferences. For example, you might want to consider other options instead of surgery. If your doctor knows this they can refer you to the right specialist or discuss the reasons if there aren't other options.

Remember, if you're still not sure about a diagnosis or treatment, it's OK to see another doctor. A second opinion could be a referral to a different specialist or it could mean that you make an appointment with another GP. If you do decide to seek a second opinion it's important not to put it off.

If you know the advice or suggested treatment is not right for you and your situation, tell the doctor the reasons why.

What you should do next...

- Follow up on test results. Find out who you need to phone and when you should do it.
- Make any other appointments you have been told you need.
- If you would like a copy of your test results, just ask. You are entitled to them. If you need help understanding them, ask for them to be explained.
- If you have forgotten how to take your medicine or treatment you can ask your pharmacist. They may ring your doctor to check on this if it is not clear.
- If you need to ask any questions after your visit, phone back the clinic or hospital.



Being discharged from hospital?

Before you leave hospital make sure you know what you need to do when you get back home. Write it down in your notebook or ask your doctor to. When you are home make an appointment with your GP to follow up on any medications or treatments you were prescribed.

Useful information

Better Health Channel

Reliable consumer health information
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Medicines Line

1300 633 424
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
www.nps.org.au
You will speak with an experienced registered nurse.

NURSE-ON-CALL

www.health.vic.gov.au/nurseoncall
1300 60 60 24
A phone service that provides immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)

www.ahpra.gov.au
The AHPRA website provides information on the responsibilities of your health professional.

Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights in Victoria

www.health.vic.gov.au/patientcharter
The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights describes the rights of people using the Australian healthcare system.

Office of the Health Services Commissioner

www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc
1800 136 066
The Health Services Commissioner helps people resolve any concerns they have about their treatment by health services providers.

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