Making the Most of Visits with Your Doctor

It is a good idea to organize your information and questions before you see your doctor. Here are some tips that will help you make the most of your visit.

Organize Your Health Information

- Keep your health information in a notebook, folder or file. If you are seeing a new doctor, you should take your information with you to your appointment.

- Keep notes about your personal health history, including the dates, for the following:
  - Your past and present health problems and illnesses
  - Any pregnancies including if you are currently pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or are breastfeeding
  - Any surgeries, dental work or procedures, including the date and name of the doctor who provided the service
  - Tests and the results, if known (ask for copies of your tests and lab reports for your records)
  - Any allergies (such as to medicine, food or the environment)
  - Date and type of vaccines that you have received
  - Your medicines
  - Health information about your parents, grandparents or siblings, if known
Preparing for Your Visit

- Write down any questions you have for your doctor or any member of your health care team.
  - Underline or highlight the questions that you want to make sure are answered.

- Write down any symptoms or problems, especially any new symptoms you have had since your last visit. For example:
  - If you have headaches, tell when you get them, how long they last, if you get dizzy, what makes them better or worse, what you have done to treat the problem and if it has worked.
  - If you have pain, tell where is it located, how it feels (burning, cramping, aching, dull, stinging or sharp) and if it prevents you from doing your normal activities.
  - Share information from recent appointments with medical specialists. Include changes in your medicine or treatment that may have taken place after a trip to an urgent care or the emergency department.

- Keep a list of all the medicines you are taking, including:
  - Medicines prescribed by any of your doctors
  - Herbs or dietary supplements
  - Vitamins
  - Creams, inhalers and eye drops
  - Over-the-counter medicines
  - Street drugs that you are currently using or have used in the past

- Write down the following information about each medicine:
  - The name
  - When the medicine was started
  - How much you take and how often you take it
  - When you take it
  - Why you take it

- Be prepared to bring in all of your medicines (in the original containers) so your doctor can review them with you at your visit. Tell your doctor if any medicine is causing side effects or if you have any problems taking the medicine as directed.
• Tell your doctor’s office or clinic (before your appointment if possible) if you do not read, speak or understand spoken English. They can arrange for someone who speaks your language, called an interpreter, to help at your office visit. An interpreter may come in person to your appointment or talk to you over the telephone or video screen.

• Ask a family member or friend to come with you to the visit. This person can listen and take notes while you are talking to the doctor or other members of your health care team.

**Things to Bring**

- Insurance information
- Photo I.D., such as your driver’s license
- Your list of questions
- Your list of medicines
- Glasses or hearing aids, if needed

**During Your Visit**

- Share the list of questions or problems you want to talk about with your doctor or other members of your health care team.
- Tell how much you want to know about your condition, treatment and medicines.
- Ask them to explain anything you do not understand. It is important for you to know what has been said, so you can take care of yourself. It is helpful for you to repeat back any instructions to make sure you understand them clearly.
- **Make sure that you:**
  - Ask for written instructions or make your own notes about how to care for yourself (such as changes in your diet or activity level, special treatments and any equipment or supplies you may need). If you have problems reading written material let your health care team know so they can use other ways to give you needed information.
  - Understand the medicine you need to take, including how much you should take, the time of day you should take it and for how many days.
- Ask about any side effects you should watch for and what you should do if these happen to you.
- If your doctor or a member of the health care team suggests a plan for your care that is different than that of your culture or religion, please tell them about your beliefs and cultural needs. They can work with you to find a way to meet your health care needs while respecting your values.

**Things to Know**

- People respond to treatments or medicines differently.
- It is important to let your health care team know if you have an Advance Directive (such as a Living Will or Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care), so they can honor your health care choices. If you would like to have an Advance Directive ask your doctor for more information.
- You have choices. You may get a second opinion. You may ask about changing your treatment plan. You can choose to have a different doctor.
- It is important to ask your doctor for a refill several days before your medicine will be gone.
- Let your doctor or health care team members know if you have financial problems that may make it hard for you to follow their instructions. This may include filling prescriptions, scheduling tests or making follow-up appointments. They may be able to make changes to a part of your plan of care or find resources to help.
- It is helpful if you can schedule your next appointment at the end of each office or clinic visit. Be sure to mark your appointments on a calendar as a reminder.

For more information on Talking With Your Health Care Team, we encourage you to visit our video library at [http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos](http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos).