

Week 7 Challenge: Make the Most of Your Health Care Team

You've probably heard the expression, "Knowledge is power." This is especially true for managing your health condition. The more you know and understand your medical condition, the more powerful you can be in taking charge of it.

Your health care team, which could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse educator, dentist, eye doctor, and others are an important part of this process. The partnership between you and your doctors, nurses and health care managers is crucial to your ongoing health. But often, patients feel uncomfortable going to their doctor's appointment. They may not know how to talk with their health care team in the best way – what questions to ask, what information and items to take with them, or even how to describe their symptoms.

Though, like any relationship, this one requires honesty and communication. It's important to prepare for your medical appointments and think about what questions you want answered and what you should bring along. Some people even find it helpful to bring a loved one along to hear what the doctor has to say and help them remember important instructions. Spending time preparing for your visit is a good investment – it will save you frustration and confusion later.

This week we will give you the resources to start developing a better relationship with your health care team. You will think about the questions you need to ask and complete a worksheet that will help you get ready for your next appointment. Remember, if knowledge is power, preparation is the key to success. Let's make the most of your health care team!

Use These Resources to Complete Your Action Items:

- *Preparing for Your Doctor's Visit*
- *During Your Doctor's Visit*
- *Be Sure to Ask the THREE*
- *What Do I Need to Know About My Medications?*
- *After Your Visit to the Doctor*
- *Additional Recommendations for those with Diabetes*
- *When do I need that test?*

Your Action Items This Week:

- Schedule a doctor's appointment if you need one.
- If you have recently had a doctor's appointment, review it.
- Complete the Doctor Appointment Guide worksheet (page 31 in workbook).
- Complete the Medications I Take Worksheet (page 32 in workbook).

Use the Week 7 Challenge Tracker to track your progress.

Step up to the Challenge and say, "I Can!"

Preparing for Your Doctor's Visit



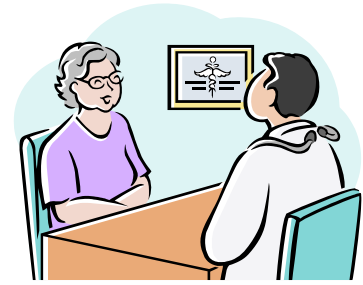
The average doctor visit lasts only 15 minutes. A lot of information is shared during this time. Unless you are ready ahead of time, you may forget instructions your doctor gave you or forget to ask him or her a question you had planned on asking. If you plan ahead, it will help you and your doctor get the information you both need to make the most of your visit. Following is a list of items to take with you.

- A list of all questions, symptoms, and concerns you would like to talk about with your doctor. Use this checklist during your visit.
- A list of all current medications or bring all of your medications in a zip-lock baggie to your appointment. Be sure to include both prescription and over-the-counter medicines you are taking and their dosage. Also list any vitamins, supplements or herbs you are taking.
- A summary of your overall health condition. Include any food or drug allergies, diagnosed conditions, treatment history, medical history, etc.
- Results of any tests since your last visit (blood pressure, blood sugar readings, cholesterol levels).
- A referral from your primary care doctor if you are seeing a specialist and need a referral.
- Insurance cards and authorization from your insurance company when special services, tests, or treatments will be done.
- A note pad and pen to write down any notes or instructions.
- If you would feel more comfortable, take a trusted family member or friend with you to help you take notes or ask questions.



During Your Doctor's Visit

- ❑ It is very important to be honest and upfront with your care team. Don't be embarrassed or afraid to talk about a concern you have. Honestly, discussing things with your health care team is the only way he or she can really help you improve your health. It is important for the care team to know what's working and what is not.



- ❑ Stick to the point. Given the short amount of time doctors usually have with their patients, it is important to give a clear, brief description of your condition or symptom.
- ❑ Let your doctor know about major changes in your life – moving, changing jobs, a loved one's death or illness, change in relationship status, etc. All of these can impact your health and how you are feeling.



- ❑ Review your list or bag of medications and vitamins/supplements with your doctor so you are sure how and when to take them.
- ❑ Ask questions!! If you don't ask questions, your doctor may assume you fully understand and don't need any more information. If you don't understand the meaning of a word or instructions aren't clear, ask your doctor to explain them in a different way. If you are worried about the cost, say so.
- ❑ Use your notebook and pen to write down any instructions, notes or answers to your questions your doctor gives you.

Be Sure To Ask the **THREE**

The **Big Three** – these are the most important questions you should always remember to ask.

1. What do I have?
2. How am I doing with it?
3. Is there anything else we (patient and the health care team) should be doing?



Here are some ideas of other questions you may want to ask your health care team.

General

- What is the most important thing I should be doing to improve my health?
- How can I do this?
- Why is it important for me to do this?
- What goals should I set?
- What parts of my body could be affected by my condition?

Medications

- What does this medicine do?
- What are the side effects?
- Are there any other options to the medicine I take?
- Are there generic versions or ones with less side effects?
- Should I take my medication with food?
- Are there any foods or drinks I should avoid when taking my medication?
- Is it okay to take over-the-counter medicine while taking this medication?

About Tests/Treatment

- Why is this test needed?
- Are there any risks involved?
- When will the results be ready?
- What do the results mean?

Why should I ask these questions?

- It is important that you, as a member of your care team, be able to understand your medical conditions and treatments.
- These questions will help you stay safe by taking your medicines correctly, knowing how to prepare for a medical test, and learning how to manage your health.

What happens if I ask and I still do not understand?

- If you still do not understand what you need to do or the information given to you, ask again!!
- It's okay to ask your care team to please explain this one more time.
- Never feel embarrassed or nervous about asking questions or asking them again.
- Your care team wants to make sure that you leave the office understanding what you need to know.

What Do I Need To Know About My Medications?

Many people with heart disease and/or diabetes take medicine. Our goal with the I Can! Challenge is to help you work towards getting off of the medications. But, if you're taking medications, it's important to understand the differences between a brand name drug and a generic drug.



What is a Brand Name Drug?

A brand name drug is the name of a medicine that is given by the company that did the research and made the medication. An example of a brand name drug used for diabetes is Motrin.

What is a Generic Drug?

- A generic drug is just a copy of the brand name drug. The generic name for Motrin is Ibuprofen.
- Generic drugs follow the same approval procedure through the FDA- Federal Drug and Administration department.
- Generic drugs are required to have the same strength and quality as brand name drugs.
- Generic drugs don't cost as much because the medicine has already been developed.
- Generic drugs are not allowed to look the same as a brand name drug, but they work the same way.

What is an OTC Medication?

Ibuprofen, an example of an "OTC" or Over - The - Counter medicine is one that is bought without a prescription. It is important to follow the directions on the label for OTC medicines. Although a prescription is not necessary, there can be complications if you do not take the medicine correctly. The label may recommend persons with diabetes and other health conditions NOT to take that medicine without notifying a pharmacist on your care. Please do not ignore this recommendation.

What things should I tell my care team?

- Medicines other providers order for you (specialists, etc.).
- Weight Loss medications that you buy over-the-counter.
- Over-the-Counter medications such as vitamins, Tylenol, eye drops.
- Herbal supplements such as Echinacea or Ginseng
- Any problems with taking your medication. Your care team can help you decide if there is another medication that would be better for you to take.



Do NOT stop routine medicines, such as diabetes, high blood pressure medicine, without talking to your care team FIRST. Some medicines cannot be stopped all at once without causing complications.

After Your Visit to the Doctor

It is important to think back on your visit when you return home. Did you ask all of your questions? Did you understand what your doctor told you? Here is a list of items that you should take home from your doctor's appointment:

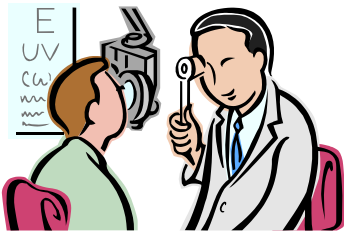
- Answers to your questions
- Results of tests taken in the office (blood pressure, pulse rate, EKG, etc.)
- Explanation of symptoms and where to get more information
- Instructions for getting test results if needed
- Any health advice given (changes to diet, exercise, drinking, smoking, etc.)
- Clear directions for any prescriptions given

Additional Recommendations for those with Diabetes

In addition to the recommendations listed earlier, people with diabetes need more than just a primary care doctor to help take care of their health. Other specialists that may be included in a patient's health care team include:



- An endocrinologist, who is a doctor with special training (and usually certification) in diseases such as diabetes
- A registered nurse trained in diabetic care to help with day-to-day diabetes management
- A registered dietitian to help create a daily diet and help you learn how food affects your blood sugar level
- An eye doctor to check your eyes regularly for diabetes-related problems
- A podiatrist to regularly examine your feet
- A dentist to regularly check for gum disease and other oral problems
- An exercise physiologist to teach you how exercise can help you control diabetes and prevent issues
- A therapist or social worker to help you deal with the emotional part of having diabetes



Also, some additional questions you should ask include:

- Do I have signs of kidney disease?
- How are my cholesterol and blood levels?
- Should I take a daily aspirin?
- Do I have symptoms of nerve damage?
- Should I get a flu or pneumonia vaccine?
- Do my feet look healthy?
- (Dentist) How do my gums look?
- (Eye Doctor) Do I have damage to my retinas?

When Do I Need That Test?

As we get older, our doctors, family members and friends often tell us about the tests we should be getting. Here is a list of the typical health screenings and vaccinations every patient should have throughout their adulthood. If you're unsure if you've had these tests, or aren't sure what they mean, take this sheet with you and ask your doctor.

For Men:

Every body is different. As always, ask your doctor what types of tests you should be receiving, depending on your condition, medical history and age.

Type of Test/Exams You Should Have	When Should You Be Tested?
Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm	If between ages 65 and 75, and you've been a smoker
Colorectal Cancer Test	Determine with your health care team
Screening for Depression	Determine with your health care team if needed
Blood Pressure	Regularly
High Cholesterol	Regularly
Obesity	Screen by calculating BMI / follow up with your health care team if needed
Sexually Transmitted Infections	Discuss with your health care team about being tested

For Women:

Every body is different. As always, ask your doctor what types of tests you should be receiving, depending on your condition, medical history and age.

Type of Test/Exams You Should Have	When Should You Be Tested?
Blood Pressure	Regularly
High Cholesterol	Regularly
Mammogram (for Breast Cancer)	Ages 50 – 74 every year
Pap Smear	Every 1 to 3 years
Colorectal Cancer Test	Determine with your health care team
Screening for Depression	Determine with your health care team if needed
Obesity	Screen by calculating BMI / follow up with your health care team if needed
Osteoporosis (Bone Thinning)	Bone density test at age 65 / If younger than 65, determine with your health care team if needed
Sexually Transmitted Infections	Discuss with your health care team about being tested

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm>)