

Things to think about before and after visiting the doctor

Going to a doctor for either a routine check-up or for a problem that has arisen can be a stressful event. This is especially true for family and friend caregivers who already have a lot on their plate. Here are a few tips to remember--whether the appointment is to discuss *your* concerns or those of your care recipient. Keep in mind that an appointment for one is not an appointment for you both. If you both have concerns, you will need to make two separate appointments.

1. Write it down - Have your questions or concerns written out beforehand. This will not only save some time but will ensure that you haven't forgotten something that you wanted to discuss with your doctor or other health care provider. Don't forget to include a list of symptoms and when they started. Some helpful things to think about include:

- When the issue started
- Where it's located
- Whether it's always there, or if it comes and goes
- What makes your symptoms better or worse
- What time of day your symptoms appear
- Whether there is anything new in your routine that could be contributing to your problem
- Whether you have already visited another medical practitioner about this

It's very important to let the doctor know if your condition is affecting your daily life, i.e. if you are finding it more difficult to interact with your family, attend to things at home or work, or do the things you enjoy.

If you don't understand something, **ASK**. Ask as many questions as necessary until you understand everything the doctor has told you. It is important that you and your care recipient know exactly what needs to be done to ensure optimal health for you both.

2. Medications - In most cases, a list of medications is enough. However, some doctors like you to bring in all of the medications with you, especially if there is more than one prescribing doctor, so they can see exactly what and how much is prescribed. Don't forget to include any over the counter medications, vitamins, or homeopathic treatments as these can affect some prescribed medications.

If you are prescribed a new medication, treatment, or both, make sure to ask if there are expenses involved that may not be covered by your provincial health or drug plan. In some cases, more cost effective options could be available.

3. Health history – It is important to discuss your health history with new doctors, including health problems and hospitalizations. If you have a completed history already written out, bring it with you. Having a hard copy to include in your file may be very helpful for future reference.

4. Allergies - It will be important to inform the doctor of any allergies, not only to medications, but also to foods or environmental allergies that may have been diagnosed in the past.

5. Ask about available resources - There may be print or online resources, home care, social work services, community organizations, or other assistance available for you and your family member or friend.

Remember that doctors are linked to a team of professionals — registered dietitians, psychologists, physiotherapists, and pharmacists, etc. and they may be aware of other community programs that may be able to help.

6. Bring someone with you – A friend or family member can lend an extra set of ears, as well as make notes to ensure no information is missed. This will help everyone to remember exactly what was said and what needs to be done, which will benefit everyone!

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

You should understand the answers to these questions.

1. What is my main problem?

You should understand what the doctor thinks the major problem is. It's possible they don't know yet, and you should understand that too.

2. What do I need to do?

You should understand exactly what actions you need to take to fix the problem, whether it's taking a medication, going to get a test done or lifestyle adjustments like a change in diet.

3. Why is it important for me to do this?

It's important that you understand why a particular intervention is prescribed and exactly how it will help. If you don't understand the *why*, you might be less inclined to follow the doctor's recommendations.

AND DON'T FORGET...

If you're given a referral, check with the receptionist about roughly how long you will wait to hear about an appointment, and what to do if you don't hear by that deadline.

The same is true for test results: You could ask how long it will take before you hear back, and what to do if you don't hear anything.

You should also know if you need to come back to the office for a follow-up appointment, or what to do if your medication doesn't work or you develop any side effects.

DID YOU KNOW? FAQs.

1. Personal Health Records (PHR)

Every Nova Scotian can sign up for a personal health record (PHR) at myhealthns.ca. This online tool gives you secure access to your health information anytime, anywhere, using a computer, smartphone, or tablet.

2. Access to information on wait times for specialists

Patients who are currently on a waitlist or exploring options for referral together with their care provider, can [view wait times](#) for a variety of healthcare services delivered throughout Nova Scotia.

The above information was adapted from:

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4088270/doctors-appointment-advice/>

You have accessed this article from CaregiversNS.org. For more information or support, contact Caregivers Nova Scotia at: 1.877.488.7390 or Info@CaregiversNS.org