

Making the Most of Your Doctors Appointments

Making the appointment

Confirm the location of the office when scheduling the appointment. Many doctors have more than one office.

Confirm that the office accepts your insurance, even if you have seen the doctor previously.

Ask whether you need to arrive early to fill out or update paper work.

Ask if you need to bring your x-rays to your appointment. It is usually necessary to bring all available x-rays to the first consultation. If the doctor recently ordered an x-ray, he or she will often have a copy of the x-ray report but they may not have seen the actual x-rays.

Preparing for your appointment

Use a notebook, day planner or organizer to write down information; to keep track of appointments, phone numbers, questions, instructions, medications; and to collect business cards in a centralized place. Take it with you to every appointment.

Put the following information in your notebook:

- All of your surgeries, including the name of the operation, the date, the name of the doctor and hospital.
- Allergies to foods and medications and the type of reaction.
- All medications you are currently taking. Include the dosage of the medication and the frequency that you take it.
- Your pharmacy information: name, address, phone number and fax number. If your pharmacy is not open 24 hours, keep the name of a 24-hour pharmacy handy in the event that you need a prescription after regular business hours.
- A copy of all of your x-ray reports, medical test results, or other medical information. If your doctor needs the information for their records, ask them to make a copy - always keep the original copies.
- Business cards for all of your specialists and any facilities or hospitals where you receive care.

Write your questions down before your doctor's appointment, leaving a space between the questions.

If you need to obtain your x-rays, call the hospital or x-ray facility and ask for the radiology file room. They will need to know your name, date of birth, date of the x-ray, and medical record number if you have it. Ask for your x-rays to be pulled so that you can pick them up. Ask to have a copy of the x-ray report included. You may be asked to sign a release form when you pick up the x-rays.

Remember that the more information you can provide for your doctor during your appointment, the more information your doctor can give you.

The appointment

Take another person with you to the appointment. It is often difficult to hear, understand, and remember everything the doctor tells you, especially when you are nervous, anxious or not feeling well.

Take your notebook, list of questions, and x-rays (including reports).

During the appointment, briefly jot down answers (key words) to your questions.

Collect a business card from each specialist or medical facility.

Ask the front desk staff for your medical record number or account number, and record it in your notebook. Each medical facility maintains a specific medical record number or account number for each patient. Providing this number when you request records or x-rays, inquire about a bill, or even make an appointment will help you get through the system much easier.