

Winter Stewardship

How to Get What You need Out of Healthcare Visits

Everyone has that moment when they are done with the visit to their healthcare provider (doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant) when they say, "Oh, I wish I had asked about this..." Don't feel bad just get better prepared for the next time. This article will explain how to get seen in a timely manner, how to get your information across and make your visit flow more smoothly.

Being on time is almost an oxymoron in healthcare. What can you do to be seen at a convenient time? If you are an early riser ask for the first appointment of the day. If you wake later, ask for the first appointment after lunch. Other things to remember expect the visit to take longer than the 10-15 minutes of your appointment. All you need as a patient or provider to mess up a good schedule is one or two patients being a few minutes late. Ask when you get to the office how late the provider is running. Say you have the 10 AM appointment. If one or more of the people ahead of you are a couple minutes late or one of them is very ill you may not get seen until close to noon.

Having questions or concerns in writing helps both you and the provider. Most providers love this as long as your list isn't 20 items long! Try to keep the list to less than 5 items. What does your provider want to know about? Are you taking your medications as prescribed? Can you afford your medications? Have you had any chest pain, shortness of breath, stomach pain, vision problems or bad headaches? Has something drastically changed in regards to your health? Have you lost weight without changing your diet or exercise? Have you had any bleeding? Has something on your skin changed? How is your mood? Are you sleeping well? Have you quit smoking yet? These are only a few of the important things providers need to know about. Big message here is if something is different or painful your healthcare provider needs to know. Bring a family member or friend for support if you need.

Please bring all the medications you take including over-the-counter medications to each visit. A neatly printed or typed list is also acceptable. This is especially important if you are seeing more

than one provider. We want to make sure we don't give you something that can cause a bad reaction with anything else you may be taking.

There are times when you should not wait for an appointment with your healthcare provider. This can include chest pains, severe trouble breathing, bleeding that does not stop, deep wounds or cuts, fevers over 103 degrees, sudden abdominal pain, prolonged vomiting or diarrhea. Do not be afraid to call 911 if you are having a serious problem. Please don't get someone to drive you to the emergency room when you are having chest pain. How are they going to do CPR on you and drive? The paramedics have oxygen, IV fluids and medications to help you right away. Additionally, they are in contact with the nearest emergency room so they know you are coming and will be ready to continue treating you.

In conclusion, being prepared for your healthcare visit can make it a more pleasant experience. Make a list, keep it short and don't forget to ask questions if you don't understand something.