

# Preparing For Your Doctor's Appointment

By Dr. Charles Gehlbach

Studies have shown that patients who have a good relationship with their doctors tend to receive more accurate diagnoses, respond better to treatment, endure symptoms better, and recover more quickly. Patients with a chronic, on-going condition have to work with their doctor for a long time. Therefore, BOTH must learn to communicate and understand each other. Chronic conditions are difficult to have and to treat. Not all patients have the same symptoms. Not all medications give the same effect or side effects. This means that a significant amount of the treatment regimen is dependent on the INDIVIDUAL patient's status and reactions, necessitating a good exchange of information between doctor and patient. Therefore, the visit to the doctor must be efficient and yield good results. The best way to make your visits helpful is to prepare ahead of time. A famous quote of Hall of Fame Coach John Wooden states "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail." The best way to prepare that I have found is "The Patient's Checkup Checklist:"

## **Before Your Appointment:**

- Write down all the questions you want to ask.
- Pick the three you think are most important to you.
- Bring a list of ALL your medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Bring in any herbs or supplements that you take.
- If you are feeling too sick or too scared, bring a friend or relative who can help take notes or ask questions for you.

## **At the Start of the Visit:**

- Ask your doctor how much time you have together.
- Do not try to diagnose your illness.
- Simply describe, as best you can, what problems you are having.
- Explain what you have already done to try to get better.
- Mention the top three "must discuss" items on your list.

## **During the Visit, Ask:**

- What does the doctor think has happened to you and why?
- What do you need to do now?

- What will the doctor do for you?
- Will it hurt, and if so, for how long?
- When will you and the doctor know more about how you're doing?

#### **Discuss A Plan:**

- Ask the doctor to write down the treatment choices for your illness, and the pros and cons of each choice.
- If you don't understand what the doctor is suggesting, ask him/her to use different words so that you do understand.
- Agree on a plan of action and write it down.
- Ask who and when you can call with more questions.

#### **What to Ask About New Medications:**

- What are the brand and generic names?
- Is there a less expensive drug?
- Which symptoms will it treat?
- How long will you have to take it? At what time(s) of day?
- What happens if you miss a dose?
- Can you eat or drink anything you want?
- Do you take it with food?
- Are there side effects?
- Will you need to refill the prescription?
- When should you feel better?

If it is too difficult to communicate because your doctor doesn't listen attentively, take your concerns seriously, or spend enough time with you, discuss it together. The doctor doesn't know you're unhappy if you don't say so. If you are not comfortable raising these issues with your doctor, maybe it's time to find a new one.

*This article was reprinted by permission by Teresa Tempkin, Nurse Practitioner, Department of Neurology, UCD Medical Center.*

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