

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

Being an Effective Healthcare Consumer: Maximizing Your Medical Appointments

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The time we spend talking to our doctors or other medical professionals seems to be getting shorter. Here are some tips on how to maximize the time spent with your care provider.

- 1.** Be prepared. Take the time before your appointment to write down all of your medications, any pertinent allergies, a brief medical history, and your chief health complaints. Include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of your primary care provider and any specialists that might be linked to your current medical issue. For information on this, see HCSP's Factsheet *Being an Effective Healthcare Consumer: Your Medical History*.
- 2.** You can prepare for your medical appointment by prioritizing and writing down your questions.
- 3.** Maintain your own health records. It can really help expedite matters if you bring copies of your most recent pertinent medical reports.

- 4.** Make eye contact before speaking to your healthcare provider. Once you begin speaking, your provider may take notes. This does not mean s/he is not listening.
- 5.** Before you start with your list, ask how much time the provider has for questions. Respect these limits and you will benefit in the long run.
- 6.** Prioritize your health issues. Be brief but clear. Start with the most important details and if there is time, you can add the less important information at the end. If you have any fears or feelings, discuss them. It can be reassuring to learn that your symptoms have nothing to do with some disease you have been dreading.
- 7.** When describing your symptoms, begin with the general picture and end with the specifics. Example: My stomach hurts. I feel nauseous in the morning.
- 8.** Ask for clarification. If your doctor uses words or explanations you do not understand, ask her to clarify or simplify her words.
- 9.** Take notes. If the doctor makes suggestions, write them down. Ask him to spell any words you might want to refer to later, such as a diagnosis, medication or procedure. If during the appointment you don't have time to write everything down, write your notes immediately after while sitting in the lobby or your car.
- 10.** Take a friend, loved one or advocate. This is especially important for appointments that may be long, complicated, or not routine. Ask your companion to take notes for you. If it's alright with your provider, you can also audiotape the appointment.
- 11.** If medication is prescribed, ask what the common side effects are and how the medication should be taken.
- 12.** Express your reservations. If your doctor suggests a treatment plan that you have some concerns about, let her know. Sometimes these concerns can be easily addressed.
- 13.** Ask if there are any alternatives. If your doctor makes a treatment suggestion and it is not one that you

are prepared to follow, ask about other options.

14. Keep an open mind. This can be your strongest ally. It is amazing how many people will avoid a medication because of their fear of side effects, only to find out later that the reality was not anywhere near what they imagined.

15. Ask the physician if there are resources or support groups she would recommend.

16. Discuss the follow-up plan. If you are scheduled to have diagnostic tests, ask the doctor when you can expect the results and how these results are conveyed to you. When does your provider want to see you next? Ask if there are any signs or symptoms that could be urgent and should be reported immediately. If the results are going to be disclosed at your next appointment and if there is going to be a long interval between appointments, ask how you can obtain earlier results. Additionally, ask the physician what is the best way to contact his office should a need arise that may not require an office visit.

17. If this is a follow-up appointment, ask for copies of diagnostic test results and surgical reports. This sets a standard that you are the manager of your health care. It also makes it easier to give copies to other health practitioners.

18. If you run out of time and still have more questions on your list, ask how you might be able to get the answers to your questions without disrupting the physician's schedule. Ask if you can leave a copy of the questions along with the request that they call you back within a specified time frame.

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For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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