

Communication Tips for Seniors: Just for the Health of It !

You play an important role in staying as healthy as possible. Take an active part in talking with your doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, and other health professionals.

1. Before Your Appointment

- Bring your discharge summary if you have been hospitalized since your last appointment (not every patient will receive a discharge summary).
- Bring your health diary or record if you have one.
- Bring or prepare a list of your prescription and non-prescription medications (examples: vitamins, herbs, cough syrup).
- Ask a family member or friend to accompany you. They can help by taking notes, asking questions and/or helping you remember what was said.
- Take your glasses and/or hearing aid with a fresh battery, if you need them. Use them.
- Write down your questions.

2. During Your Visit

- Ask your most important questions first.
- Describe all problems clearly.
- Talk honestly about how you are feeling.
- Ask to have your medications reviewed.
- Ask questions. For example:

Tests and procedures

- what is this test for?
- how long will it take to get results?
- how will I be notified of the results?

Medication

- what is this medication for?
- how and when do I take it?
- what effects and side effects can I expect from the medication?
- when should I call if I have side effects?
- what do I do when I finish the prescription?
- do I stop taking other medication when I start taking this one?
- do I take it with food?

Diagnosis

- what does the diagnosis mean?
- what can I expect?
- what treatment might I need ?

Other kinds of questions

- what changes do I have to make?
- are there community services that might help me?

- Take notes or ask for written information.
- Speak up during the visit. For example:
 - "Please speak more slowly and clearly".
 - "I don't understand".
 - "Please give me more time to answer".

- Discuss personal issues (such as grief, memory problems or incontinence) which may require attention.
- Ask for another appointment if you need more time.

3. After your appointment

- Review notes and information received.
- Phone your health care practitioner if you have further questions.
- Report changes or side effects to your health care practitioner.

GOOD CARE DEPENDS ON GOOD COMMUNICATION

Notes:

Prepared by the Council on Aging of Ottawa and adapted from:
Talking with Your Doctor National Institute on Aging
How to Talk to Your Doctor Health Canada
Getting the Most Out of Doctor Visits Healthy Ontario

We acknowledge the support of the Regional Geriatric Assessment Program

March 2005

