



Talking with Your Doctor

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Good communication is crucial, if you're going to get the best medical care, from your healthcare team.

WHEN YOU CALL THE DOCTOR

If you need to call your doctor because of illness or new symptoms that concern you, here is a partial list of some information you will want to have ready to share.

- Pulse: irregular? Fast?
- Heartbeat: normal? Racing? Thumping?
- Nausea? Vomiting?
- Numbness or loss of function?
- Lightheadedness?
- Fever? What temperature?
- Pain: where? How long? How severe? What caused it? What makes it better? is it sharp? Dull? Throbbing? Steady?
- Any recent new doctors: any new doctors you've seen since your last visit? New diagnoses? new medications prescribed? New tests performed with results? New medical treatment recommended?
- Medicines you're taking now - prescription, over the counter, herbs or other supplements.

Check with your doctor ahead of time to determine which information your doctor would like you to provide, if you need to call your doctor between appointments.

BEFORE YOUR ROUTINE APPOINTMENT

It's important to come prepared for your doctor's appointment, in order to get the most value out of the visit.

- Do your homework before you visit your doctor. Although the doctor is trained to find out what's wrong with you, it's up to you to be proactive and make sure no symptoms are missed.
- Make a list of items you want to discuss. Don't leave your questions to memory; you may forget or be too nervous to bring them up during the visit.
- Write down any symptoms or changes in your condition, and bring your prescriptions or a list of all medications with dosages and times taken, including herbs and supplements.
- Fill your doctor in on information about your lifestyle: Social and fitness routines? Are you a vegetarian? Allergic to any foods or medicines? Do you have strong feelings or religious restrictions about any treatment?
- Are you having trouble taking your medication as prescribed: forgetting to take the medication? Experiencing side effects?

PROVIDING A CLEAR PICTURE

All too often a patient is embarrassed to share the whole picture with the doctor, such as they may be experiencing forgetfulness, incontinence, or haven't been taking their medication as prescribed because they can't afford it.

When you see a doctor the process is like putting a jig saw puzzle together. The more pieces of the puzzle the doctor has, the more likely the doctor will be to determine what's wrong and how to best help.

You have a better chance of getting an accurate diagnosis and an effective treatment plan, if the doctor knows everything that you know about your condition and symptoms.

YOUR FIRST VISIT - ADVANCE PREPARATION

Make sure your doctor has your medical records. You may need to have them transferred from another office.

Write down information you'll need to fill out the doctor's questionnaire, including

- Prior illnesses
- Hospitalizations
- Accidents
- Operations
- Allergies
- Medications and dosages taken
- Insurance company name and policy number

AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

If possible, ask a friend or family member to accompany you to your appointment in order to take notes for you.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask the doctor to explain anything you don't understand.

Write down instructions you think you might forget, or ask the doctor to write them down for you.

Ask straight forward, specific questions about your condition.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES

- What's wrong with me?
- What tests if any are being ordered and why?
- If medication is being given ask why, and inquire if there could be any side effects.
- Ask if there might be a problem combining your current medications with the new prescription(s).
- Ask if there is a generic form of this medication, which is usually less expensive?
- What are other options to treat your condition?
- What are the risks and benefits of each treatment?
- What is your prognosis?
- How soon can you expect to start seeing an improvement?
- What should you do if I don't begin to feel better?

AFTER YOU GO HOME

- Follow the doctor's instructions for treatments or new medicines exactly.

If you don't understand something, or are unable to follow the directions for any reason, call your doctor.

- Don't be afraid to seek a second opinion.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

- Get a list of the specialists on your healthcare team and what they do, so you can address your questions to the right person.
- Carry a list of your medications and dosages with you at all times.

FILE OF LIFE

Be prepared when a medical emergency strikes with a "File of Life".

FILE OF LIFE

KEEP INFORMATION UP TO DATE !!
Review At Least Every Six Months !

MEDICAL DATA REVIEWED AS OF MO. YR.

Name: _____ Sex: _____
M F

Address: _____

Doctor: _____ Phone #: _____

Doctor: _____ Phone #: _____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Address: _____

A "File of Life" is a medical information packet that is designed to provide Emergency Medical Personnel (Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians, ER doctors) with important information that allows them to provide treatment immediately.

The File of Life is designed as a plastic pocket folder when your information can be placed, and has a magnet that allows the packet to be attached to a metal refrigerator. When called to a home, EMS personnel are trained to look on the refrigerator, to see if there is a visible File of Life.

It is also a good idea to make copies of this information to keep in your wallet, and the glove compartment of your car next to your car registration, in case of an emergency.

On the File of Life form you can list:

- Emergency contact information
- Your doctors' contact information
- Your insurance information
- Your medications and dosages
- Your current medical conditions, including Allergies
- Your medical history
- The hospital where you would like to be taken to ensure that you are taken to a hospital that is In-Network with your health insurance plan.
- If you have Advance Directives or a DNR, and where these documents can be found

To obtain a File of Life Packet you may want to contact your community's local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) office to see if they can provide you with File of Life Packet.

Photos from the Printshop and File of Life.org

The information in this article is provided as an information resource only, and is not to be used or relied on for any diagnostic or treatment purposes. This information is not intended to be patient education, does not create any patient provider relationship, and should not be used as a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.

Please consult your health care provider for an appointment, before making any healthcare decisions or for guidance about a specific medical condition.

Linda Ziac is the owner and founder of The Caregiver Resource Center. The Caregiver Resource Center is a division of Employee Assistance Professionals, Inc. which Linda founded in October 1990. The Caregiver Resource Center provides a spectrum of concierge case management and advocacy services for seniors, people with special needs and families.

Linda's professional career spans more than 48 years in the health and mental health field as a CT Licensed Professional Counselor, CT Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Board Certified Employee Assistance Professional, Board Certified Case Manager, and Board Certified Dementia Practitioner. In addition, Ms. Ziac has 15 years of experience coordinating care for her own parents.

Linda assists seniors, people with special needs and their families; in planning for and implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life. Linda meets with individuals and family members to assess their needs, and develop a Care Team, while working with members of the Team to formulate a comprehensive Care Plan (a road map). Once a plan is in place, Linda is available to serve as the point person to monitor and coordinate services, and revise the plan as needed. This role is similar to the conductor of an orchestra; ensuring that there is good communication, teamwork, and that everyone remains focused on the desired goal.

For more information, please contact:

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