

YOUR HEALTH, YOUR WAY:

Tips to Improve Health Care Visits

YOU PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN EVERY STEP OF YOUR HEALTH JOURNEY. Whether you are seeking help for a specific health issue or you are getting a checkup, health care visits are an important part of supporting your health and well-being.

It is recommended that everyone get a checkup every year to maintain good health and screen for any potential issues. Additionally, you know your body best, and it is important to seek care early when something feels off.

Seeing your health care provider (HCP) can feel stressful, scary, or overwhelming. The tips below can help you make the most of every health care visit.



Get Ready Before You Go

Be Open. It's normal to feel uncomfortable sharing information about periods, pee, poop, sweat, or vaginal discharge and fluid. Sharing information about how your body is or is not working helps your HCP learn more about your health and how to best provide you with any treatment if needed. If you feel uncomfortable talking about these topics, practice explaining your symptoms, because the more you talk about them, the easier it will be. Remember that your HCP discusses these types of things regularly with patients.

Write It All Down. Make a list of anything in your body that hurts, worries you, or is new or different than it was before. This not only applies to your physical health but also applies to your mental health. Use this to make a list of questions for your HCP, and put the most important questions at the top. Jot down any prescription or over-the-counter drugs or nutritional supplements, such as vitamins, that you take. Keep all this in a notebook or on your phone to take to your visit. The National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, has [free downloadable worksheets](#) to help you prepare for your next appointment.

Gather and Share Your and Your Family's Health History. Your health history is important. It can include information about your periods, your pregnancy, your mental health, and any diseases you may have had. If you have it, information about the health of your parents, your siblings, and even your grandparents can also give clues about your health risks, as many health conditions are genetic.

Bring Support. If you want support during your visit, you can ask a friend or family member to come with you. They can help you feel more at ease during the appointment, help you remember your questions, and help write down the next steps given by your HCP. They can even advocate for you, if necessary. Even if you bring someone with you, you can always ask that person to step out of the room so you can speak privately with the HCP.

Be Honest. If you are nervous or scared about health care visits, don't like how you have been treated in the past, or sense that you will be judged, please know that you are not alone. Other people have had the same feelings and experiences, but health care visits do not have to be this way. Share your concerns with your HCP. Tell them you care about your health and want a positive and successful visit. You and your HCP should work as a team to help you maintain good health and address any concerns.



Know Your Patient Rights and Share Your Thoughts

Know Your Rights. Among your many rights as a patient are the right to understand your treatment options and the right to receive respectful care. If your HCP doesn't explain things clearly, makes you feel bad about your body for any reason, or says your problems are not real, express your concerns and communicate your needs.


Have an Open Conversation. When your HCP talks, listen closely and take note of any guidance given. Your HCP should also listen to you. You might have more questions as you talk with them; these are also important to ask. If you don't understand something your HCP is telling you, it is *always* OK to ask for an explanation to help you better understand.


Understand That Change and Second Opinions Are OK

See Another Health Care Provider. If you are unsure about a treatment plan, cannot get your questions answered, or don't feel heard, you can look for a different HCP who understands you better or might make you feel more comfortable. Sometimes, telehealth visits can give you new or additional options.





Take Charge and Follow Up


 **Take the Next Steps.** Follow any instructions given by your HCP, which may include scheduling your next visit, getting tests or lab work, and following your treatment plan.


 **Stay in Touch.** Ask your HCP how to reach them with questions or updates. If they offer a health care portal, sign up if you can easily access a computer or smartphone. It's a good way to share and track information quickly.

If you receive results from a test that you need help understanding, you can always reach out to your HCP's office.

 **Keep a Health Diary.** After your visit, write down what your HCP said, keep a list of next steps or new questions, and note how you feel about your health and treatment over time.

 **Put Your Self-Care First.** Self-care is always important, especially when dealing with a health issue or change in treatment. Ask your HCP for ways you can improve your health at home, manage stress, and prioritize your well-being. Explore more [self-care strategies](#) from the National Institutes of Health.

 **Learn More.** Look up information about your health conditions and treatment options from trustworthy sources. The HHS Office on Women's Health's [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov) website is a good place to start. Knowing more helps you make better decisions.

 **Schedule Follow Ups.** If your health care provider recommended tests, referrals, or another visit, set those appointments up as soon as possible.

Want to Learn More?

Explore our full toolkit, which includes more helpful resources, at www.womenshealth.gov/nwhw.