

## **Making the Most out of a Visit to the Doctor**

It seems that we spend more time waiting for our turn than we do actually seeing the doctor. That is why it is essential that we make the most of each visit and communicate with our doctors effectively.

Unfortunately, we don't have all day to meet with our doctors, because a typical visit with the doctor only lasts between 15 and 30 minutes, our jobs as the patient have changed dramatically. We must be as prepared as the doctor is when our time with them arrives. Some simple tips can help make your doctor visit worthwhile for the both of you and maximize the time you spend together.

### **Bring the Essentials**

As you know doctors are pressed for time and they are going to require information from you. Knowing what to bring with you can take the guesswork from your doctor in assessing your diagnosis, as well as the legwork out of his or her staff. It benefits you to come prepared with as much information about your medical history and current symptoms or anything you've recently been diagnosed with. If this is a visit with your primary physician, then odds are you won't need to bring much if anything at all but if you are going to a new doctor or being referred to a specialist or someone new, there are a few things you will need:

- **Medical Records** – You should bring along a copy of your medical records for your doctor to keep in your file. This should include records from any doctor you have been seen by or at least the referring physician. Most offices are happy to supply you with a copy of the records or even forward them to the new doctor at your request.
- **X-rays and Test Results** – Again, if you are being sent to a new doctor, your current one will be able to send this information on for you or give them to you to take on your visit. Any tests or radiology x-rays will be needed if your doctor is a specialist and going to be following your care.
- **Medications** – Many people assume that their doctor already knows what medications they are on. While that information is listed in your charts and records, you should still have a list of what you are taking, how much of the medication you take and how often. This will keep your doctor from having to look up the information and will save them time during your visit.

### **Why Are You Seeing the Doctor?**

Aside from actually visiting the doctor, you should know exactly why you are going. Unnecessary as that sounds, many women don't realize if they are being referred to a new doctor exactly why they are going. You need to address this with your referring doctor as well as making sure the new physician is covered through your insurance. If it is a routine visit or you are scheduling the visit yourself because of symptoms or illness you are having, the appointment desk will want to know why you are being seen and will ask you for details and information as to why you are requesting an appointment.

### **Q and A with the Doctor**

Once you are brought into the exam room your initial contact will be with a nurse. They will ask you some preliminary questions in regards to symptoms and how you are feeling or what brings you to the doctor. They will also take vital information (height, weight, blood pressure, and temperature) and possibly even take the information you've brought with you so the doctor can look it over before he or she comes in to see you. At this time you can let them know you have specific questions for the doctor so the nurse can inform the doctor ahead of time.

When your doctor comes in you can let them know that you do have some questions for them, or as mentioned before, tell the nurse so the doctor is aware and can take the extra time with you. It's helpful to write down any questions you have before you get to the doctor and bring them with you. People often lose focus and tend to forget what they wanted to ask. Keep your questions short and to the point so the doctor isn't trying to figure out what you are asking. When you receive the answer, jot it down and if you don't understand, get clarification. Doctors are more than happy to clarify or explain anything because they want you to understand your healthcare.

Your doctor can easily provide all this information for you but may send a nurse back in to give you the information at the end of your visit. A general rule to follow when asking questions is using the five W's and How, especially when it comes to tests or being referred to a different doctor:

**Who** will be seeing you?

**What** will be done (tests, consultation)?

**When** will it happen (an appointment most likely scheduled)?

**Where** will tests be performed or where the office is?

**Why** (Very Important) are you being seen specifically or being sent there?

**How** will tests or procedures be done?

Should you have questions after the visit, you can call the office and speak to a nurse or possibly even email the doctor with your questions. Be prepared to wait for a call or email back so use this option when your questions or concerns are not emergencies.

Although your visit with the doctor will be brief, you can do your part to prepare beforehand. This way the doctor can efficiently get to the bottom of your visit and address your concerns, making your visit with the doctor a more enjoyable and informative one.