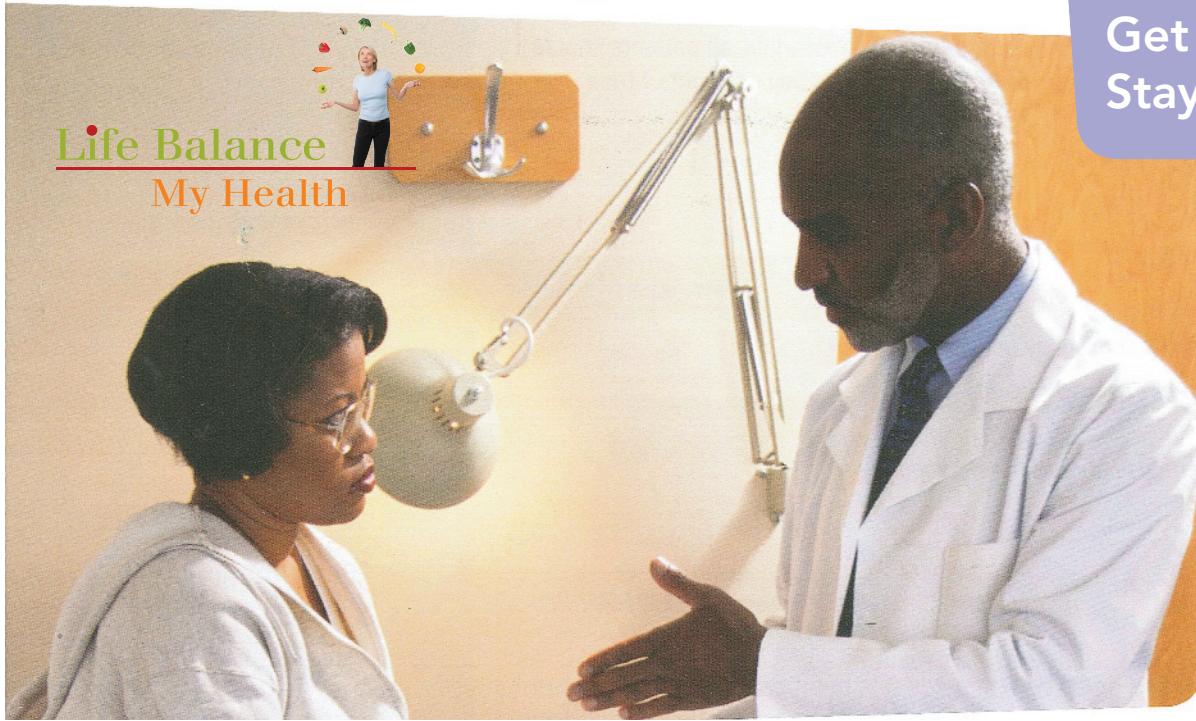


Get Healthy.
Stay Healthy.

Life Balance
My Health



Questions to Ask your Doctor

Do you get nervous or embarrassed about asking your doctor questions? Well, you shouldn't. Your doctor is there to provide you with a very valuable service: to help you achieve better health. And physicians know they speak a unique language - so they understand when you need to stop them for a quick translation.

Think of it this way: When you are buying a car, you do the research and make yourself heard when working out the details, right? Try taking the same approach as a health care consumer. You need to be a diligent, well-informed advocate for yourself and your loved ones. Because if you don't ask the hard questions to protect your family, who will?

Health literacy: learning how to read health care

According to the National Patient Safety Foundation (NPSF), no single factor affects a person's health status more than their literacy skills.' But, in recent years, researchers have begun to explore the idea that health literacy - more than just a measurement of reading skills - may be the key to improving outcomes for people with complex health issues.

Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and act on health information. Low health literacy can affect any population segment - people of any race, age, or income or education level. An intelligent, educated person who doesn't understand the medical terms his or her doctor uses, for example, could have low health literacy.

The most efficient way to improve your health literacy is to ask your doctor questions, and to keep asking questions until you are certain you understand your prescribed course of treatment.

Do your homework.

During a rushed, 10-minute appointment, it can be stressful remembering everything you need to tell and ask your doctor. That's why you should come prepared with a written list of all the medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements and alternative therapies you use, as well as anything that has changed in your medical history since your last appointment.

Also, bring a written list of questions for the doctor, along with a pen or pencil and pad for taking notes. And, whenever possible, have a friend or family member accompany you. They may think of questions you haven't asked, and can later help you recall what you and your doctor discussed.

How to prioritize

The NPSF has developed materials, including sample questions, to help even the shiest patients make the most of their doctor's visit. Based on these materials, all patients should be able to answer the following **three key questions** by the time they walk out of their physician's office:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important that I do this?

Other general questions include:

- What should I be doing to prevent or delay health problems?
- Are there any lifestyle changes I should make to improve my health?
- Are there any tests or screenings I should have, based on my age or other risk factors?
- Am I due for any vaccinations?

When there's a diagnosis

If you receive a diagnosis, your mind might be racing too fast to process the information or ask the right questions. So, if you're expecting a diagnosis at your next doctor's visit, bring a list of questions - just in case. This list may include:

- What is the technical name of my disease or condition?
- What does it mean, in everyday language?
- What is my prognosis? Will this affect my length and quality of life?
- Is this condition genetic, hereditary or contagious?
- What are my treatment options, and how soon do I need to make a decision?

Good communication, good health

Understanding the information your health care team gives you is vital to your health. You can maximize your health literacy by taking the steps below.

- Keep asking questions until you understand your doctor's responses.
- Take notes, or bring a tape recorder or a family member to take notes for you.
- Ask your doctor to write down instructions and give you printed material about your condition.
- Ask where you can go for more information.
- Speak with your nurses, pharmacists or other health care professionals for more information and insight.

Resources

For more guidance on communicating effectively with your doctor, visit the following websites:

- Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease website: "Ask Good Questions for Better Health":

www.fightchronicdisease.org/pdfs/PersonalHealth.pdf

- WebMD® website: "1110 Questions":

www.webmd.com

- U.S. Food and Drug Administration website "My Medicine Record":

[www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/my_medicine\)records.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/my_medicine)records.htm)

- National Patient Safety Foundation website: "Good Questions for Your Good Health":

www.npsf.org/askme3

