

How to Talk to Your Doctor

BY CASSANDRA VAN DYCK



In Canada, navigating the health care system is not without its challenges. Finding a family doctor can be tough, and getting the needed time with your GP once you have one may be even harder. Due to high demand, appointments are usually kept short. Many patients struggle to express their concerns in the allotted time and leave appointments feeling they have not been heard. It may sometimes feel that this common situation is out of your control, but there are things you can do to help make sure your needs are met by health care professionals.

The following tips from [Literacy Partners of Manitoba](#) may help you to talk to your doctor more efficiently, understand the kind of care and medications you will be receiving, and ensure your voice is heard.

Remember Your Rights

I can expect:

- to be told what's happening to me
- to have my questions answered in words I can understand
- to know the possible treatments, and to say yes or no, and to change my mind
- to be treated with dignity, kindness and respect at all times
- to know that my health information will not be shared with anyone without my agreement

Plan Before You Visit A Doctor:

- Think of what you want to talk about before you go. You can take someone with you to help you talk to the doctor.
- Write 2 or 3 words that will remind you what you want to ask.
- Ask the most important things first.
- Tell the doctor as much as you can about what's bothering you.
- Know what medicine you are already taking (including aspirin and cough syrup, etc.)

At the end of your visit, you might say, “Doctor, I just want to make sure I understand.”

Then ask these questions:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?
4. Will I get better? How long will it take?

Write down the answers.

If you still don't understand, you might...

- say: "This is new to me. Will you please explain that to me again?"
- ask: "What does that mean? I don't understand that word."
- ask for a picture of the medical problem
- ask the doctor to write things down
- bring someone to the next visit
- call Health Links and ask them to explain (786-8200, 1-888-315-9257)

Ask Questions About Medicine:

1. What is the name of this medicine? Can you write it down for me, please?
2. What will it do for me?
3. Are there any problems that the medicine might cause?
4. How much does it cost?
5. Are there other medicines or treatments that might help me with this problem?
6. When should I take the medicine?
7. How should I take the medicine?

Words by **Cassandra Van Dyck**