

Convincing your Loved One to go to the Doctor

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Your mother has a suspicious mole on her back, but refuses to get it checked out, or your husband is short of breath and insists it's nothing. Refusing to go to the doctor is not uncommon at any age, but when you are responsible for the health of a loved one, having to force them to go to appointments can be incredibly burdensome.

There could be a number of reasons why they don't want to go. They might be in denial about their condition, embarrassed, scared, or they might have a different perception of doctors and when to visit them.

Imagine your partner said to you "Hey, when everyone comes over for your birthday next week I'd like to show them some funny home movies of you". You might not feel comfortable being exposed like that in front of your kids, family and friends. This might be how your parent is feeling when you suggest they go to the doctor and share personal/possibly embarrassing information. One way to make things easier is to try to understand where their resistance is stemming from.

At a time when there is no urgent need to go to the doctor, sit down with them and try the following exercise. Ask, "What was it like to see the doctor when you were a kid?" Attitudes towards doctors are formed during childhood and can last lifetime. In 1930s, during the Great Depression, going to the doctor was something that only those with a lot of money could do. You might find that your loved one holds the opinion that you don't see a doctor unless there is no alternative, that hospitals are where you go when you die, or that men don't get sick or visit doctors. You may already have heard them say this kind of thing before. The aim is to get them talking about their core beliefs. You can ask follow up questions such as, "Do you think it's still like that now?". This can present an opportunity to remind them gently that doctors and medical technology have changed a lot over the years.

Perhaps they had a bad experience with doctors in the past. Ask, “What was your best/worst experience with a doctor?” Sometimes one bad experience can be holding them back, but simply talking about it might make it easier to overcome, particularly if they know their fears are understood.

Ask, **“What would the perfect doctor be like?”** Listen for specifics like gender, or age and listen for qualities like “good listener,” and “trust worthy.”

They may indicate they don’t feel their current doctor listens to them and they feel frustrated, or shy if they don’t know they can trust their doctor. **Carefully explore their reasons.** Finally, let them know that you now have a much better idea of why they don’t like going to the doctor, but remind them that you care about them and their health. Ask, “If we find you a doctor you feel comfortable with and I go with you, can you imagine yourself going to an appointment?” You may be surprised by their answer. If they do agree to go but won’t provide pertinent information on their own, ask yourself, “Can I ever imagine her speaking up about this to the doctor?” Many patients over 80 years old grew up with the idea that doctor knows best, and they may not ask questions or offer information. **Acknowledge their feelings,** “Mom, I know you are hoping the doctor will ask you about your bowel movements so you can tell him about your constipation and I know how uncomfortable it makes you, but this is too important to leave to chance.” Ask, “Do you mind if I tell the doctor or have them ask you about your bowel movements at your next appointment?” If the person you are caring for wants you to participate in their medical care make sure they tell their doctor and ask the doctor to make a note of this in their file.