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### **Speak Up at the Doctor's Office**

Going to the doctor is rarely something we look forward to. It often comes with anxiety—especially if you're not feeling well or are worried about a health concern. Doctors and other healthcare providers play an important role in our lives, and to do their jobs well, they need clear and complete information from us. That's why knowing how to make the most of your medical appointment is so important. Clear and honest communication is key.

Before your appointment, take a few minutes to organize your thoughts. Think about the most important questions or concerns you want to discuss. Are you experiencing a new symptom? Do you have questions about medication or treatment? Writing down your questions ahead of time can help ensure nothing important is forgotten. Prioritize your list, placing the most important items at the top. Don't wait until the end of the visit—or for your doctor to bring up the topic—to ask your key questions.

During your appointment, speak up if you don't understand something. Medical information can be confusing, and it's okay to ask your doctor to explain it in a different way or use everyday language. Taking notes can be helpful, and if questions come up after you get home, call the office for clarification rather than waiting until your next visit. Before leaving, make sure all of your questions have been answered.

You may also want to consider bringing a trusted family member or friend with you to your appointment. Two heads can be better than one. Let your companion know what you hope to accomplish during the visit—they can help by taking notes or reminding you of questions. Remember, however, that the appointment is between you and your doctor. Don't hesitate to ask for some private time if needed.

It's also important to keep your doctor up to date. Share a current list of all medications and supplements you are taking and let them know if you've seen other healthcare providers, such as specialists, or if you've been to the emergency room. Be sure to mention any changes in appetite, weight, sleep, or energy level, even if they seem minor.

The National Institutes of Health recommend the following tips to help you get the most from your doctor visits:

- Write down a list of questions and concerns before your appointment.
- Consider bringing a close friend or family member with you.
- Speak openly about how you feel, even if something seems unimportant or embarrassing.
- Ask questions until you fully understand the answers.
- Take notes or ask your companion to take notes for you.
- Ask about the best way to contact your doctor (phone, email, patient portal, or health app).
- Remember that other members of your healthcare team, such as nurses and pharmacists, can also be valuable sources of information.

Your health is important, and you deserve to clearly understand the information and guidance you receive from your healthcare providers. With a little preparation and open communication, you can make the most of your medical visits and take an active role in your own health care.