

At the Doctor's

Gathering, understanding, and managing medical information for an elder is one of the caregiver's major tasks. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of visiting the doctor with the elder in your care.

Before the Appointment

- 1 Write down questions or issues that you'd both like to discuss with the doctor.
- 2 Prioritize the questions so that you are sure to cover the most important questions first.
- 3 Make a list of any changes since the last visit: physical (bumps or bruises, new glasses or hearing aids, difficulty sleeping, etc.) and emotional (a move, an accident, the loss of a loved one).
- 4 Bring along all medications, the dosages, and who prescribed them. Include any natural remedies, supplements, and over-the-counter drugs. (If you can't bring them all, make a list.) Include the pharmacy's name and phone number.

At the Appointment

- 1 Find out how the doctor's office works: the names of his or her office staff, nurses, or physician's assistant; office hours and locations; lab procedures; emergency coverage; and hospitals you will be referred to.
- 2 Remember to get several copies of the doctor's card to keep at home, at work, and so on.
- 3 Ask to be present during the initial consultation (and the examination if possible).
- 4 After the examination, ask to be included in the discussion about findings and treatments.
- 5 Ask questions until you understand all the information the doctor is giving you. Don't let him or her rush you out. There is no such thing as a wrong or stupid question!
- 6 If a drug or treatment is recommended, ask why it's being prescribed, what its potential side effects are, what the expected outcomes are, and what other options are. The doctor or staff may also know about insurance coverage or payment options.
- 7 Take careful notes. Ask if there are pamphlets or Web sites that can provide more information.
- 8 Find out who you can call, and when, if you have additional questions after your visit.

The Caregiver's Handbook: A Companion Resource to Caring for Your Parents at pbs.org/caringforyourparents/community/index.html contains a wealth of information about all aspects of caregiving, including health care and home care issues.

Additional Resources

- “Talking with Your Doctor” from the National Institutes of Health’s Senior Health Web site explains how to prepare for the visit, and how to understand the more technical aspects of health care, such as diagnoses and follow-up lab tests. Go to <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/talkingwithyourdoctor/toc.html>.
- “Be Prepared for Medical Appointments” from the Department of Health and Human Services’ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality contains a list of questions you can print and take with you to the doctor’s office. Go to www.ahrq.gov/qual/beprepared.htm or call 301-427-1364 and request AHRQ Publication No. 07-0039-A, May 2007.
- “Talking with Your Doctor” from the Medline Plus Web site at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/talkingwithyourdoctor.html has resources and links in both English and Spanish.

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