

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR GP VISIT

A visit to the GP can be **stressful**. You may be **anxious** about your symptoms, **worry** that you cannot tell your story in 10-15 minutes, or that you might not **understand/remember** what is being said. This independent guide developed by patients and healthcare professionals* may help.

Before your GP visit

Ask yourself:

- What are my main symptoms? Keep the list short.
- What is worrying me? E.g., might I have cancer?
- What do I want out of the consultation? E.g., some tests, a prescription or referral to a specialist?

Tips

FOR GETTING AN APPOINTMENT

- This can be difficult during busy periods. Don't give up. You may need to send an email, book online, ring up or make a visit.
- You will be asked about your problem in general terms. Keep it simple e.g., "I am worried about increasing headaches."
- Some surgeries ask you to keep to one problem. If you need more time, request a double appointment.
- If you have an intimate problem, you can ask for a same-sex doctor or chaperone.
- If English is not your first language, you can request an interpreter or bring a trusted adult companion to translate.

During your GP visit

- Begin with the most important problem - the one that worries you the most. Do not leave it until the end!
- Do not feel embarrassed to talk about personal issues.
- Be honest about risk factors such as alcohol, smoking, and recreational drugs.
- Stay focused. Don't stray into other issues unless these are relevant to your problem.

Tips

TO DESCRIBE YOUR SYMPTOMS

- Use simple words e.g., *dull ache* in my right loin, *squeezing pain* below right ribs, *dry cough*.
- What brings my symptoms on? Or, are they constant?
- When/how did your symptoms start?
- Does anything make them better or worse?
- How do symptoms affect you? E.g., "dizziness stops me from going out".

TO BEST PREPARE FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Be on time. Bring your list of questions, relevant letters, or medication with you.
- Ask a friend/relative to come with you for help if you are worried that you might forget something important, or if you have hearing difficulties.
- First impressions matter - how you look, what you say, and how you say it are important. Be honest - don't underplay or exaggerate how you feel.
- You may get examined, so wear clothing/shoes which are easy to remove/put back on.



Doctor, my stool's been looking weird...



If you are given a **diagnosis**...

...make sure you understand what this means and what treatment you will receive.

If you receive a **prescription**...



...make certain you understand what is being prescribed; how you take it and for how long, and if there are any related side effects.

If the diagnosis is not clear and you need **further tests**...

...ask what they are for, what is involved, and if there are any risks.

You may be asked about:

- ✓ Past medical problems, operations.
- ✓ Details of current/previous medications, including those bought over the counter or online.
- ✓ Your family's medical history e.g., has anyone had anything similar?
- ✓ Foreign travel.
- ✓ Any allergies to medications or food e.g., penicillin, lactose.

Tips

DURING THE VISIT

- Getting the approach right can be difficult when you feel ill or have been waiting. Be friendly and polite (remember, the doctor may have already seen 20 patients that day).
- Your story is important to reach a diagnosis and assess progress. Come prepared with a clear short summary, and if you get distracted, return to your original problem.
- Don't be surprised if your doctor writes as you talk, or checks facts and new treatment guidelines on the computer.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions, make notes or request any relevant leaflets.
- Make sure you understand the next steps before you leave, any follow-up appointments and what you should do if your symptoms fail to improve or worsen.

After your GP visit



- Make written notes of what was said and the next steps.
- Pick up any prescriptions, test forms or referral letters.
- Read any written information, such as brochures or other educational materials.
- Follow your GP's instructions about taking medicine and booking tests.
- Record all appointments in your phone or diary.



More Information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/>

<https://111.nhs.uk/>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/>

<https://www.patients-association.org.uk/>

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/>

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/>

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://patient.info/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/>



Responsibility

*This guide was prepared by members of the Forgotten Patients, Overlooked Diseases charity (Registration 1202424). The information is offered in good faith and does not replace advice from your doctor or other health professional. We do not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions.

www.forgottenpatients.org