

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



January 2004

Be prepared for your next doctor's appointment



Get the most out of your doctor's appointments.

Being prepared for your next doctor's visit can help you and your doctor to focus on the most important issues concerning your health. Here are some tips to help you get informed and prepared.

Do some research. Learn as much as you can about your health condition or illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/health) and the National Institute of Health (www.health.nih.gov) provide information on many health topics.

Maintain a personal health history file. Compile a chronological medical history listing your previous health problems. Include any medical records you may have. People tend to switch doctors more frequently today and a health history can help your doctor get an overall picture. Indicate if any of your close relatives have a

history of cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or other serious diseases.

Bring a list of your medications to your appointment. Remember to include prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and any herbal remedies that you are currently taking or have taken recently. Include the dosages and frequency that you take the medicines.

Be honest with your doctor. Be prepared to discuss your symptoms openly and frankly. Be honest about how much you exercise, eat, drink and smoke. Tell your doctor if you are not taking your medications as prescribed. Let your doctor know if there are any changes to your health, diet, medications or stress levels.

Ask questions. Write down your questions before you go so that you remember them all. During your appointment, ask questions as you think of them. Ask your doctor

to clarify anything you don't understand. When your doctor answers a question, write down the answer so that you can refer to it later.

Bring a friend. Doctors say that bringing a trusted friend or relative to your appointment is a good idea. Your friend can serve as a second set of eyes and ears for you. If English is not your first language, a friend can help to translate.



Inquire about tests. Ask if any tests or lab work is *necessary*. If blood is drawn, ask what tests will be done. If your doctor's office doesn't call you within a week to give you results of your lab work, call them to get the results.



How to find a good physician

Choosing a physician is an important decision. You want someone who you can trust and who takes the time to discuss your health needs. If you are looking for a new doctor, here are some suggestions to help you find one who is right for you:

- Check your health plan. Get a list of doctors covered by your plan (www.Anthem.com).
- Get recommendations. Talk to your friends, relatives and co-workers to see who they recommend.
- Go online. You can search for information about potential doctors online. The websites for the American Medical Association (www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm) and the American Board of Medical Specialists (www.abms.org) let you search for information about doctors.
- Use your personal preferences as a guide. Do you want a male or a female doctor? Do you want a bilingual doctor?

Do you want a young doctor or a more experienced one? Trust your gut feelings.

- Check the doctor's office hours and location. Is the office open evenings or weekends? Is the location convenient to your home or office?
- If you have a hospital preference, make sure the doctor is affiliated with that hospital.
- Find out how long it takes to get an appointment. Some physicians are so booked up that it will be weeks or months before you can get in to see him or her.
- Find out if the doctor is in solo or group practice. If the doctor is in solo practice, who is the backup when the doctor is unavailable?

Remember that your decision is not final. Use your first visit with the doctor to determine if you are compatible with him or her. If not, keep looking for a doctor that suits your needs.



Ideas for controlling your weight

Many people put on a few extra pounds during the holidays. Here are some simple tips to help you lose those extra pounds and control your weight:

Eat breakfast. Studies show that those who skip breakfast tend to binge later on. Those who eat breakfast tend to weigh less. Fill up on high fiber cereal, whole grain bread or fruit.

Exercise in the morning. Aerobic activity will burn calories during the workout and for several hours afterward.

Pack your lunch. When you bring your lunch to work, you can control the portion size and the calories.

Eat slowly. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to realize that you are full. Eating quickly may lead to overeating. Chew slowly and savor each bite.

Enjoy healthy snacks. Snack on low-fat crackers, pretzels, apple slices or carrot sticks. Avoid snacks with partially hydrogenated oils, which are the worst kind of fat for your body.

Avoid high-sugar sodas or juice-drinks. Drink 100% juice, low-fat milk, or water instead.

Serve smaller portions. Try serving yourself about one third less than you usually eat. Make your food look bigger by using smaller plates.

Brush your teeth. You will think twice before eating a snack when your mouth is fresh and clean.

Take a walk. Take a walk after lunch to burn some calories and speed up the digestive process.