Care Partner Information
Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Making the Most of a Doctor Visit

It is important for older adults and their care providers to prepare for a health care visit. Most visits are short, and it is easy to forget to talk about something important. Some people like to bring a family member or friend to the visit to help remember what to say, and what the doctor says. It is important that the patient gets to talk with the doctor, not just the care partner. Be sure to plan who is going to say what.

To plan for a doctor's visit, write down the top 3 health concerns. Also make note of any health changes since the last visit. The table below lists some important changes to discuss.

Tell the doctor about any changes to:	
memory, thinking or mood	daily activity
walking, balance or falls	bathroom habits
hunger or weight	personal safety
medications (new or changed)	sleep

For each health problem, the doctor should ask for more details. The table at right lists some questions the doctor may ask. Be prepared to answer these questions.

The doctor may ask about the patient's health goals. They will ask what the patient would like to see happen, and what they want to avoid.

It is also important for the patient to tell the doctor who they want to make medical decisions if the patient is unable to do so.

Questions the doctor may ask
When did you first noticed this change?
Have you had this problem before?
When and how often does it happen?
What makes it better or worse?
Do you notice any other symptoms?
Have you seen other doctors for this concern? What treatment did they provide?

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health

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Many people have one or more serious illnesses, and see more than one doctor. Sometimes medications for one illness can make another illness worse. Bring every medication in the bottle it came in so the doctor can make sure all the medications work well together. Also bring any health items that the patient uses to the doctor's appointment. Below is a list of items to bring.

What to bring to a doctor visit
Eye glasses, hearing aids
Canes or walkers
List of all other doctors or therapists you see
All medications, including a list of over-the-counter medications
Insurance card

It is also a good idea to ask the doctor questions. Below is a list of 3 good questions to ask.

Questions to Ask the Doctor
What are my main problems?
What do I need to do?
Why is it important for me to do this?

These questions help patients and their care partners to better understand health issues, and what they need to do to stay healthy. It is okay to take notes, or ask the doctor to write down what they say. If the patient or caregiver has a hard time hearing or understanding what the doctor says, they should tell the doctor.

Remember, not every health concern should be treated with a pill. Patients should consider different types of treatments, like physical therapy. It can take time for the patient and doctor to figure out how best to treat health issues. Expect to come back to the doctor for more than one visit. More visits to the doctor also helps the patient and doctor get to know and trust each other better.