



## Communicating With Your Doctor

One of the key components of getting good health care is to communicate effectively with your health care team - health physicians, nurses, insurance personnel, and AgrAbility. However, this can be challenging. You may be afraid to ask questions and/or feel rushed since most doctor visits are about 15 minutes. Also, health care professionals may use medical jargon you do not understand, and you may feel uncomfortable sharing personal, possibly embarrassing, information. These fears and feelings can be overwhelming, blocking effective communication with your doctor and preventing adequate treatment of symptoms or worsen any on-going illnesses or injury.

Effective communication with a medical team means having an agenda about your health concerns and the quality of care you want to receive. Expect your health care team to be attentive, caring, and able to explain things clearly. If they do not meet these expectations, ask them to clarify symptoms and treatment plans, especially if you have a chronic illness like diabetes or arthritis. If you come prepared to your appointment with notes, it will make the experience more effective and comfortable.

### Use P.A.R.T to Guide You

**Prepare:** Before visiting or calling your health care provider, prepare an agenda. What are the reasons for your visit? Take time to write a list of all concerns to ensure they get addressed. Highlight important items and give it your doctor at the beginning of the visit. The doctor may point out something medically important that you haven't thought of. Also, prepare a list of all your medications and dosages. If this is difficult, put all your medications in a bag and bring them with you, including vitamins and over-the-counter meds. Remember visits are short. When the provider asks how you are feeling, be prepared to describe your symptoms and be as open as you can in sharing your thoughts, feelings, and fears. It is helpful to bring a notepad with all that is listed above.



**Ask:** The most powerful tool in the doctor-patient relationship is the question; this answers important missing pieces of information and closes gaps in communication. Asking questions reflects active participation in the process of care. Getting answers and information you understand is a cornerstone of self-management. Be prepared to ask questions about diagnosis, tests, treatments and follow-up.

The “**B.R.A.N.D.**” acronym can help you remember what to ask.

**B**enefits: What are the benefits of this procedure?

**R**isks: What are the risks?

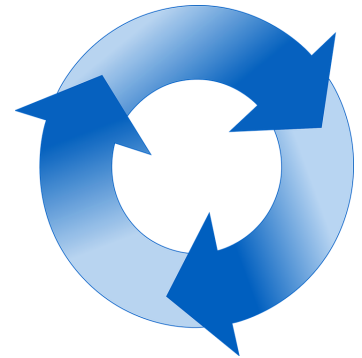
**A**lternatives: What are my alternatives?

**N**othing: What happens if I do nothing?

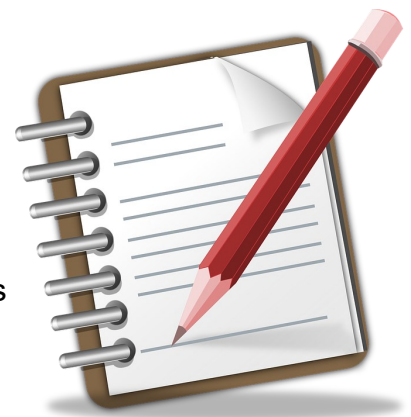
**D**elay: What happens if I delay this procedure?

Understanding these questions thoroughly can give you a peace of mind and a clear understanding in deciding the next step for your health.

**Repeat:** To check that you understood everything report back key points. For example, “I will be taking this three times a day.” Repeating back also gives the provider a chance to correct misunderstanding. If you don’t understand or remember something the provider said, admit that you need clarification. For example, “I’m pretty sure you told me some of this before, but I’m still confused about it.” Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Questions are important to prevent misunderstandings and help refresh your memory. You may want to take notes or bring another person to your doctor visits to help you understand and remember.

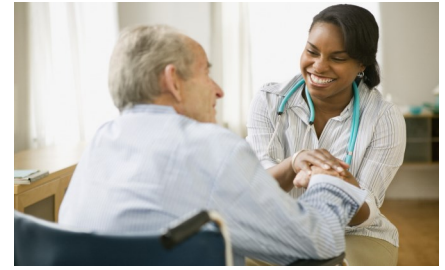


**Take Action:** At the end of the visit, you need to clearly understand what to do next. This includes treatments, tests, and when to return. If necessary, ask your provider to write down instructions, recommend reading material, or indicate other places you can get help. If you choose to stop following the provider’s advice, let them know. For example, “I didn’t take the aspirin because it gave me stomach problems” or “I’ve tried to exercise, but get tired quickly.” If your provider knows you stopped following advice and why, she or he may offer other suggestions.



## Communicating with Your Health Care System

Sometimes it is hard to connect to your health care team because almost everything is automated for efficiency. If you are unhappy with this process, there are other ways to ease this problem. You can share your feelings with staff, nurses, or doctors who can give you advice. Below are more hints to communicate directly.



**“I hate the phone system.”** Often when we call for an appointment or information, we reach an automated system. Unfortunately, we cannot change this. However, phone systems do not change often. If we memorize the numbers or keys to press, we can move more quickly from one part of the system to another. Sometimes pressing the pound key (#) or 0 will get you talk to with a person.

**“It takes too long to get an appointment.”** Ask for the first available appointment and take it. Then ask how you can learn how to make cancellations. Also, some offices are able to call you as soon as they have an opening. Ask the person making the schedule what you can do to get an earlier appointment and explain why you may need an earlier appointment.

**“I can never talk to my doctor.”** It is hard to get a provider on the phone, but you might be able to e-mail. Many systems now have ways that doctors and patients communicate through e-mail or an online portal. The next time you see your provider, ask about this.

**“I have to wait too long in the waiting room or the examination room.”** Emergencies can cause waiting. However, you can try calling your doctor's office and ask how long you will have to wait. If it is too long, you can take a book or ask to reschedule.

**“I don't have enough time with the provider.”** When making an appointment, ask for the amount of time you want, especially if this is more than 10 or 15 minutes. Be prepared to make a case for more time. You can also ask for the last or first appointment of the day.

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