



Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Do you get nervous or embarrassed about asking your doctor questions? Well, you shouldn't. Your doctor is there to help you improve your health. Doctors also know that some of the words they use can be very confusing, so they understand when you need them to explain things better to you.

You have the right to ask your doctor questions so that you get the information you need to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Keep asking questions until you're sure you understand everything the doctor is telling you to do.

What's preventive care and diagnostic care?

Did you know that there are tests that can help you stay healthy, catch any problems early on and could save your life? These tests are called preventive care because they can help prevent some health problems. They're different from diagnostic tests, which help diagnose a health problem. Diagnostic tests are given when someone has symptoms of a health problem and the doctor wants to find out why.

Do your homework.

It can be hard to remember everything you need to tell and ask your doctor. That's why you should bring a written list of all the medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements and other treatments you use. And tell your doctor about anything that has changed in your health history since your last appointment.

Also, bring a written list of questions for the doctor, along with some paper and a pen or pencil so you can take notes. If possible, have a friend or family member go with you to your appointment. They may think of questions you haven't asked, and can help you remember what you and your doctor talked about.¹

Ask your doctor to write down instructions for you and give you some information about your condition that you can take home to read. You can also ask your doctor where you can get more information. You can even speak with your nurses, pharmacists or other health care professionals for more information and help.²

It's important to know the difference between preventive tests and diagnostic tests. For example, if your doctor wants you to get a colonoscopy (a test that checks your colon) because of your age or because your family has a history of colon problems, that's called preventive care. But, if your doctor wants you to get a colonoscopy because you're having symptoms of a problem, like pain, that's called diagnostic care.

Preventive care is paid for by your medical benefits with us, but you'll have to pay part of the cost of diagnostic care, depending on your specific plan with us.

Not all preventive care is recommended for everyone, so talk to your doctor about what you need.

What to ask your doctor

Here are some important questions you should ask your doctor when you go for a visit:³

- Do I need to come back for another visit?
- Can I call for any test results?
- What else do I need to know or do?
- Is this a preventive or a diagnostic care visit?
- What should I do to prevent or delay health problems?
- Are there any changes I should make to improve my health?
- Are there any tests or screenings I should have, based on my age or other risk factors?
- Am I due for any shots?

After you've talked with your doctor, there are three questions you should be able to answer for yourself:³

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important that I do this?

If you can answer those three questions, you'll know you got the information you need to get or stay healthy.

When you're diagnosed with a health problem

If your doctor finds that you have a health problem, your mind might start racing too fast to really understand what he or she is saying or to ask the right questions. So, if you're expecting the doctor to give you a diagnosis on your next visit, bring a list of questions with you – just in case. That list can include:⁴

- What is my disease or condition called?
- What does it mean, in plain language?
- What could happen to me because of this? Will this change the length and quality of my life?
- How did I get this condition? Is it contagious?
- How can it be treated, and how soon do I need to make a decision?



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¹U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, *Be an Active Member of Your Health Care Team*, (2009): [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)

²U.S. National Institutes of Health, National Eye Institute, *Talking to Your Doctor* (2009): [nei.nih.gov](https://www.nei.nih.gov)

³National Patient Safety Foundation, *Ask Me 3* (Accessed January 2011): [npsf.org](https://www.npsf.org)

⁴Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease, *Ask Good Questions for Better Health* (Accessed January 2011): [fightchronicdisease.org](https://www.fightchronicdisease.org)

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