Make Every Minute Count

Your Guide to a Better Doctor's Visit

Visiting the doctor can feel overwhelming — especially for individuals who may face complex health issues, communication challenges, and quick appointment times. The simple strategies here will help you prepare for your visit, share your health story clearly, and work with your doctor to create a plan that meets your needs.

Prepare

Start strong. State your main concern first. Use **OLDCARTS** to explain symptoms:

O **Onset:** When did it start?

L **Location:** Where is the pain located?

D **Duration:** How long does it last? Has it changed?

C **Character:** How would you describe the symptoms? Sharp, dull, throbbing, bloody, etc.?

A **Associated Symptoms:** Have you noticed anything else or other symptoms with your main concern?

R **Radiation:** Do your symptoms move throughout your body?

T **Treatment:** Does treatment make it better or worse?

S **Severity:** On a scale of 1-10, how bad is it?

Present your symptoms so your doctor can put the pieces together.

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Engage

Don't assume your doctor knows all your records. Include:

- **Past medical history:** Previous visits, specialists, medication, chronic illnesses, surgeries
- **Family history:** Hereditary illnesses, causes of death, age of onset
- **Social history & lifestyle:** Occupation, alcohol/tobacco/drug use, diet/exercise

Share your perspective:
"Can I share my thoughts with you?", "I'm not sure if this is relevant, but..."
"I feel embarrassed to ask, but..."

Respond

1. **Confirm you understand**

- "Does this work for me?"
- "I don't understand."
- "Why are we doing this?"
- "Are there alternatives?"

2. **Write down and repeat back the plan. Ask questions:**

- Doctor, what do you think is going on?"
- "What is the treatment plan?"
- Ask yourself: "How do I feel about this plan?"

3. **Ask how to best communicate after the visit.**

4. **Confirm next steps — you are responsible for them.**

Prepare	**Engage**	**Respond**
OLDCARTS	Puzzle Pieces	Shared Decision Making
Main Concern	Patient Perspective	Repeat Back Plan