



# Getting What You Need at Your Doctor Visit

When you make an appointment to see your doctor, whether if it's for a routine check-up or for a new health issue, there is more to do than just call the office to schedule the appointment. Planning ahead and being prepared can help lower your stress and make your visit more productive, both for you and your doctor.

## **BASIC IDENTIFICATION (ID) – ALWAYS CARRY WITH YOU**

- State issued identification card
- Health Insurance Card(s) – private and Medicaid/Medicare
- Updated portable medical summary/emergency information sheet (1 page)
- Signature stamp (if you have trouble writing your name)

## **Before Your Appointment – Medical Information and Health Insurance**

### **MEDICAL INFORMATION FOLDER/BAG – TAKE TO THE DOCTOR**

Sometimes it's easier to have things organized ahead of time. Some folks have a plastic folder or canvas bag already packed with items they will need for their appointments.

- Copies of items listed in "Basic ID"
- Any new test results you have received, list of questions
- Money for co-pay, parking, taxi and phone calls

### **PREPARE A HEALTH FILE – KEEP AT HOME IN A SAFE PLACE**

While your doctor and hospital will create and keep a file on you that has your medical information, immunization records and hospitalizations, what happens when YOU need information from these files when the office is closed or when you are out of state? It's a good idea for YOU to have a duplicate file at home. Here's what you need to file in a safe place. If you do not have these items ask your doctor for help in getting copies.

#### **FILE 1 – PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION**

- Copy of your health insurance card(s) front and back
- Copy of State Issued identification card (Drivers' License or state ID card)
- Portable medical summary/emergency medical information sheet (1page)

#### **FILE 2 – RECORDS AND TEST RESULTS**

- Immunization records
- Copies of medical tests, blood work, height/weight chart and other test results

#### **FILE 3 – RECEIPTS**

- Receipts from insurance company of bills they have paid or reimbursed you
- Receipts from out-of-pocket medical expenses: co-pays for office visits, prescriptions, equipment and other related items (may be tax-deductible)

#### **FILE 4 – MEDICAL HISTORY & NOTES**

- Copies of hospitalization discharge summaries
- Copies of discharge summaries from any specialists

#### **FILE 5 – NOTES FROM YOUR DOCTOR**

- Copies of progress notes from your doctor
- Copies of letters that your doctor writes to other doctors about your health
- Ask your doctor to cc you on these letters

## FILE 6 – CORRESPONDENCE

- Copies of letters you have written: medical justification documentation, appeals to insurance companies, requests for services and other medically related correspondence
- Replies to your letters paper clipped or stapled to your letter

### GETTING THE APPOINTMENT THAT WORKS FOR YOU

<b>PLAN TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT</b>	<p>Before calling for an appointment, look at your schedule to see what dates/times work best for you – think about not missing school, work and arranging transportation. Write down dates/times that are good and ones that would not work due to something else being scheduled.</p> <p>Tell the scheduler your preferred dates/times.</p>
<b>CALL &amp; GET THAT APPOINTMENT</b>	<p>When you talk to the person who schedules the appointment, tell him/her dates and times that work best for you and request an appointment time that you know you can be there.</p>
<b>MEDICAL TESTS</b>	<p>Sometimes during routine visits your doctor will want to order some tests. When you make this appointment ask if you will be having blood work or a urine specimen and, if so, should you eat or not before the visit. Some tests can't be done if you have eaten.</p>
<b>URGENT VISITS</b>	<p>While you may have routine appointments for “well visits,” there may come a time when you are not feeling well and need to be seen the same day or as soon as possible. When you get connected to the person in charge of scheduling appointments you will need to identify that you have an urgent medical issue that requires you to be seen by the doctor today or as soon as possible. The office receptionist may ask you what the problem is – sometimes the doctor or nurse will call and talk to you and then decide if you need to come into the office or if a prescription can be called in to your pharmacy.</p> <p>**If you have an emergency that is life threatening, go to the emergency room immediately. If you have time <i>en route</i> call your doctor's office and let them know you are going to the ER and why.</p>
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<p>How are you getting to the doctor's office? Are you driving, or is someone else? Are you taking public transportation (cab, bus, subway)? Figure out how much time it will take to get to the office, then add 30 minutes – to make sure you won't be late. Bring along money for parking or transportation fares. Remember it is better to arrive early than be late. (Some people call the office ahead of time to see if the Doctor's appointments are running behind and then adjust when they will arrive.</p>

## DAY OF YOUR APPOINTMENT

<b>BE ON TIME</b>	<p>Figure out how you will get to/from your doctor's visit, then allow some extra time (for example 30-60 minutes) for travel. Remember that your appointment time is when you need to actually be in the doctor's waiting area, already signed in – not the time that you arrive at the front door of the building or medical center.</p> <p><b>YOU ARE LATE</b> – Always call ahead if you are unexpectedly running late (for example, due to transportation problems).</p> <p><b>DOCTOR IS LATE</b> – It's okay to call the office and see if the appointments are running on time or if there has been a major delay due to an unexpected emergency. You can decide whether to reschedule or adjust your arrival time. Some people use this time to do homework, write letters or read.</p>
<b>HEALTH INFO</b>	Bring your health insurance card, state-issued identification, updated portable medical summary, and signature stamp if you need one.
<b>PAPERWORK</b>	If this visit was a referral from your primary doctor, make sure to bring copy of the referral (insurance companies require this).
<b>MONEY/CHECK</b>	Bring money or check to pay for transportation, phone calls, office co-pays that are not covered by your insurance.
<b>PERSONAL CALENDAR</b>	If you need to make another appointment, it is helpful to know the dates/times that are good for you. Dates can be written or logged in paper calendars, appointment books or PDAs.
<b>MEDICAL UPDATE &amp; QUESTIONS</b>	Your updated portable medical summary will list any new medications or herbs, names of doctors you are seeing and other important medical information. Prepare a list of questions and concerns you would like to discuss with your doctor. It's easy to forget things once you are in the examining room. Write down, tape record or program your questions onto your communication device or ask someone to help you do this.
<b>WHAT TO WEAR</b>	Wear clothes and shoes that will make it as easy as possible for you to get undressed for your examination and dressed afterwards.

## YOUR APPOINTMENT

- **ON YOUR OWN or NOT?** Decide ahead of time if your parent and/or guardian will come into the room with you, and let the office staff know this when you arrive for your appointment.
- **WHAT DO YOU NEED?** Speak up for the accommodations that you need, if they are not offered to you. For example, if you cannot get into the examining table by yourself, there should be an adjustable height table in the room or staff to assist you. Your family members should not be expected to do this. If you cannot stand on the scale, there should be an alternate type of scale available. Not getting weighed is not an option and could possibly be bad for your health. If you are incontinent, be sure that appropriate bathroom facilities are available – lying on the floor is not an option! If you have requested an interpreter, always call a day or two beforehand to confirm that the interpreter will be present. Do not agree to let family members or friends interpret for you.
- **QUESTIONS NEEDING ANSWERS** – Let your doctor know that you have some questions to ask during your visit. Make sure your doctor communicates with you in a way that you can understand. Tell the doctor if he or she is using medical jargon or vocabulary that is hard for you to understand.
- **WHAT'S HAPPENING?** Keep asking questions – what are you doing to me? What is the name of that instrument? What test have you ordered and the reason for it? When will you have the results? Are there risks? What are my options? What are the side effects of the medicine you want me to take? When do I need to see you again and why? How can I reach you if I have questions or problems?

## Web Sites

## Tips for Taking Charge of Your Health

### **INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION** [www.communityinclusion.org](http://www.communityinclusion.org)

Offers transition manual for free download, includes section on health transitions, with fact sheets for families and YSCHN. "Taking Charge of Your Health Care" and "Communicating with Doctors and Other Health Care Providers".

### **KIDS AS SELF ADVOCATES (KASA)** <http://www.fvkasa.org/resources/health.html>

Written by and for teen and young adults with special health care needs, includes helpful articles such as "Communicating with Your Doctor", "Keeping a Health Diary", and "Transition to Adulthood". Lots of helpful resources, links, listserv and opportunities to get involved.

### **HEALTH CARING CARDS** [www.savethepatient.org](http://www.savethepatient.org)

Offers "Health Caring Cards" in five languages, available for free download. Designed to be printed out, filled in and folded down to pocket size. Includes rights of patients, getting ready for doctor visits, questions to ask at your appointment, questions about medicines for your doctor and pharmacist, and emergency information card.

### **VIRTUAL HOSPITAL** [www.vh.org/adult/patient/familymedicine/prose](http://www.vh.org/adult/patient/familymedicine/prose)

Information site for providers and patients offers "Communicating with Doctors: It's Their Job to Listen" as part of "Health Prose – One Minute Update for Your Health" feature. Many resources and links related to all aspects of health care.

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Tip sheet developed by Patti Hackett, Glen Gallivan, KASA and Faye Manaster, 2003, revised 2007.

The HRTW National Resource Center is headquartered at the Maine State Title V CSHN Program and is funded through a cooperative agreement (U39MC06899-01-00) from the Integrated Services Branch, Division of Services for Children with Special Health Needs (DSCSHN) in the Federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Activities are coordinated through the Center for Self-Determination, Health and Policy at the Main Support Network. The Center enjoys working partnerships with the Shriners Hospitals for Children and the KY Commission for CSHCN, HRSA/MCHB Project Officer: Elizabeth Mcguire, of the HRSA/MCHB, Rockville MD.

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy or position nor imply official endorsement of the funding agency or working partnerships.