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The National Women's Health Information Center

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How to Talk to Your Health Care Provider

Waiting in your health care provider's (HCP) office can be a nerve-wracking experience, whether you're waiting to see a doctor, a nurse, a therapist, or another type of practitioner. As you flip through old magazines in the waiting room, you might worry about what's wrong or become aggravated about getting behind schedule. Then, when you see your HCP, the visit seems to fly by, leaving only a few minutes for you to explain your symptoms and concerns. Later that night, you remember something you forgot to mention and wonder if it matters. Knowing how to talk to your HCP will help you get the information you need, when you need it, especially when visits are oftentimes short. Here are some tips for talking with your HCP:

- **Make a list of concerns and questions to take to your visit with your HCP.** While you're waiting to be seen, use the time to review your list and organize your thoughts. You can share the list with your HCP.
- **Describe your symptoms clearly and briefly.** Say when they started, how they make you feel, what triggers them, and what you've done to relieve them.
- **Tell your HCP what prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, and other supplements you're taking.**
- **Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history — withholding information can be harmful! Describe allergies to drugs, foods, or other things.** Don't forget to mention if you are being treated by other HCPs, including mental health professionals. Don't feel embarrassed about discussing sensitive topics. Chances are, your HCP has heard it before! Don't leave something out because you're worried about taking up too much time. Be sure to have all of your concerns addressed before you leave.
- **If your HCP orders tests, be sure to ask how to find out about results and how long it takes to get them.** Get instructions for what you need to do to get ready for the test(s) and find out about any dangers or side effects with the test(s).
- **If you are diagnosed with a condition, ask your HCP how you can learn more about it, including what caused it, if it is permanent, and if there are lifestyle changes you can make to help yourself feel better.** Be sure to ask about all of the options for treatment, and how you can find out more information about treatment options.
- **When you are given medicine and other treatments, ask your HCP about them.** Ask how long treatment will last, if it has any side effects, how much it will cost, and if it is covered by insurance. Make sure you understand how to take your medicine, what to do if you miss a dose, if there are any foods, drugs or activities you should avoid when taking the medicine, and if there is a generic brand available at a lower price (you can also ask your pharmacist about this).
- **Understand everything before you leave your visit.** If you don't understand something, ask to have it explained again.
- **Bring a family member or trusted friend with you to your visit.** They can take notes, offer moral support, and help you remember what was discussed. You can also have that person ask questions as well.