

## How to Help Your Doctor Help You

### **You and Your Doctor were Raised Differently.**

If you're of a "certain age," you learned three lessons very well.

Respect authority. Don't talk about yourself. Don't complain.

Those rules helped you earn a living, take care of your family, and give to society.

Times have changed. The men and women who are your doctors learned different rules. They ask questions and speak frankly.

To get the care you need from your doctors, you need new rules.

Your doctors *expect you* to:

- ask questions
- give them detailed information
- help them help you

### **You and Your Doctors are Partners.**

You want answers to your questions and good medical care. That's what your doctors want to give you. But they need your help.

Here's what you should do.

**1.** *Before you leave home, write a list of your questions and what you will tell the doctor.*

Medical appointments can be rushed or upsetting. You might forget something important. Take a written list to jog your memory.

Include what's happened since your last visit. How did your new medication or home-care plan work? Did you have any tests? Write it down.

**2.** *At the **beginning** of the appointment, tell the doctor why you're there.*

When your doctor asks how you're doing, say why you're there. Even if you already told the nurse, tell the doctor.

**3.** *Tell the doctor what concerns or confuses you.*

Use clear language to describe what's going on. If something hurts or scares you, say so. Your doctor needs that information to make a diagnosis.

Stay focused on your list.



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## 4. Give Detailed Answers and Ask Questions.

The questions your doctor asks are important. Details you think are unimportant may help your doctor figure out what's going on.

### Now Put it All Together.

Here's an example of a good partnership between a doctor and patient. Notice how Jim tells the doctor very specific details.

**Doctor:** "Hi Jim. How are you?"

**Jim:** "Hi Dr. Smith. I'm glad you could see me. I'd like you to check my shoulder. I'm worried because it's getting worse. Should I work through the pain or stop using it completely for a week?"

**Doctor:** "How long has it been bothering you?"

**Jim:** "It started three weeks ago."

**Doctor:** "Did something happen that brought it on?"

**Jim:** "Around the time it started, I was shoveling mulch. I didn't notice anything at the time, but it started to hurt a couple of days later. I realized I wasn't using my arm much and was taking aspirin a couple times a day."



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**Doctor:** "Tell me how and when it bothers you."

**Jim:** "Any time I reach over my head or try to lift any weight, even a jug of milk. When it hurts, should I ignore the pain and keep going?"

**Doctor:** "I'm not sure yet. I need more information. What else makes it worse?"

**Jim:** "It hurts when I drive, even for 15 minutes. And it wakes me up at night."

**Doctor:** "What seems to make it feel better?"

**Jim:** "When I do nothing with it and just use the other arm. Should I put it in a sling or take something besides aspirin?"

### Be a Good Teammate.

If Jim downplayed his pain, the doctor would follow his lead. He'd assume the shoulder pain didn't really bother Jim.

Jim pulled his own weight. He told the doctor he was worried and gave detailed answers. He helped the doctor zero in on the most likely diagnoses and tests to order.

**Jim's frank speaking saved him from unnecessary tests, wasted time, and a lot of pain and worry.**