



How to maximize your time at the Doctor



Have you ever left the doctor's office wishing you had more time? Wondering if your doctor really listened to and understood your symptoms? Many patients have difficulty getting what they wanted out of their visit.

Do you want the inside scoop on how to maximize your time at the doctor's office, so that you're confident when you walk out, that you've gotten the most out of your visit? Lean in and I'll tell you.

First, understand what your doctor is coming from. Doctors have not received a raise from Medicare in 20 years and the regulations for Medicare and the Electronic Medical Record have forced physicians to spend much more time on paperwork. In order to pay the bills, doctors have to see more patients in a day. What this translates into is that most appointments are 15 minutes or less. If you spend this time talking to your doctor about the weather or your pet cat, you're wasting valuable time. You should be focused on why you were there.

So, first of all, when you make your appointment, explain clearly to the person on the phone, why you're coming in to see the doctor and make sure that your doctor accepts your insurance.

If this is a visit to a new physician, write out your medical history, including any medical issues, surgeries and a list of your medications, supplements and allergies. The Hive80 website has a form that you can use for this purpose. Also, write down your family's medical history and any personal history of smoking, drinking, or drugs. In order for your doctor to do their job, you must be honest.

Make sure you bring in any old records from other physicians you've seen for similar issues and any labs, x-rays or other studies. You don't want these to be repeated. Write a detailed list of your symptoms and when your symptoms started.

For example, the pain in my lower back started five days ago when I lifted a sofa. It started as a 10 out of 10 pain, but now it's five out of 10. The pain radiates down my left leg and I haven't been able to go to work or even drive. It's worse with standing and better when I lie on my right side. I've taken Advil with some relief, as well as an ice pack.

You don't want your doctor to take their time asking you questions that you already know they're going to ask. I love when patients hand me their notes. I use my voice dictation system to quickly summarize the pertinent findings and then move on to second and third level questions that allow me to form a diagnosis and treatment plan.

It's okay to take notes, or even to record the appointment, so that you can remember what the doctor said when you get home and it's fine to bring a family member or a friend who can help you to remember. Sometimes patients will even call a family member to listen in. If you plan on doing this, make sure your family member knows you're going to be doing this and they're available.

Never be embarrassed to tell your doctor, if you don't understand something that they've said. Sometimes doctors use medical jargon without realizing that they're not explaining things in terms that lay people understand. Repeat what the doctor has told you and be sure you understand and ask for clarification if needed.

Sy Syms used to say, "An educated consumer is our best customer."

You need to understand why the doctor's recommending certain tests and procedures. Always ask for a copy of any results, of any tests the doctor orders for you. You should keep detailed records of your medical care.

Be an advocate for yourself. Your doctor takes care of thousands of patients. It's hard for them to remember all the details for all of them.

Ask your doctor to explain any test results to you. Request a copy of the results for your files and before you leave, be sure you understand what needs to happen next. Do you need any further diagnostic tests? When will you get the results? If you've just received the diagnosis, what are your treatment options and write down the answers. You can also ask if your doctor recommends any specific reading materials or websites about your condition.

If you've been given a prescription for a new medication, do you understand how and when the medication should be taken? Are there any side effects you should watch for? How will you know if the medication's working? What happens if you miss a dose?

Ask the doctor for written information about any medication, procedure or test that you'll be undergoing and find out the best way to contact your doctor if you have any other questions or problems. Is there a secure email address or a phone number that you can call? I have an email address that I respond to every day for my patients.

This is Doctor Judson Brandeis coming to you from Hive80.

Thank you very much for listening.