

Communicating with your health care team

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Taking an active role in your health care is an important part of ensuring your needs are met as successfully as possible. Patients who are active members of their health care team tend to get better medical results and are happier with their health care experience.

1. Learn the basics

Communicating effectively with your doctor and other health care providers is important. It is helpful to prepare before you talk with your care team to better understand your treatment options and work together to choose the option that is best for you.

2. Learn how to better communicate with your provider

Even if your medical needs are straightforward, you will have a better experience if you prepare for your visit. Preparing for your visit will help your provider listen to you about your health needs and explain things to you more clearly.

Use the following strategies to be prepared to speak up and be an active partner in your health care:

Before your appointment

- Make a list of your health concerns.
- Make a list of any questions you would like to discuss with your provider. Prioritize your questions so that your most important ones are among the top three.
- Bring a complete list of the medications you take, including how much, how often, and for how long you've been taking them.
- If possible, bring a family member or a friend with you to the appointment. This person can help you by asking additional questions, taking notes, and talking with you afterwards about what the provider said.
- If there is a language barrier, reach out to your care provider ahead of time to secure translation services if possible

During your appointment

- Ask for clarification if you don't understand something. You can ask your provider to write the information down or draw a picture.
- Repeat back what you heard to your provider to make sure you understood the information correctly.
- Talk about your options together. These might include tests, medicine or surgery.

- Ask about risks (what can go wrong) and benefits (how this can help)
- Discuss your experiences, beliefs, values and other issues that might affect your choices.
- Take notes during your appointment.
- Ask how to find other resources like websites or articles where you can learn more.

After your appointment

- **Stay informed.** After your visit, you can keep learning about your treatment options by using the resources your provider gave you. If you have concerns, schedule a time to discuss them with your provider.
- **Ask your providers to talk to each other.** Any specialist you see should discuss your diagnosis and treatment plan with your primary care provider. This will help your different doctors work together to manage your condition.
- **Follow up on test results.** Ask when test results will be available and if you have not heard about them by that date, call your provider's office about them. Be sure to request a copy of your test results along with an explanation of what they mean. If any results are abnormal, ask to discuss them with your provider. Ask that copies of any test results be sent to your primary care provider to avoid repeating tests.
- **Make appointments — and keep them.** Be sure to schedule any follow-up appointments if you are referred to a specialist.
- **Monitor changes in your health.** Notice how your body reacts to new medications or treatments. Write down your symptoms so you can talk about them at your next appointment, or if they are serious, call your provider.
- **Speak up.** Trust your instincts and speak up if you think something may be wrong with your medications or treatment. You always have the right to ask questions and to request to stop a procedure or treatment until your concerns are addressed.

10 basic questions you should know

1. What is the test for?
2. How many times have you done this procedure?
3. When will I get the results?
4. Why do I need this treatment?
5. Are there any alternatives?
6. What are the possible complications?
7. Which hospital is best for my needs?
8. How do you spell the name of that drug?
9. Are there any side effects?
10. Will this medicine interact with medicines that I'm already taking?

3. Learn more about partnering with your provider while choosing the right treatment for you

- Learn more about how to communicate with your provider using [The Joint Commission's Speak Up™ patient safety program](#)
- Learn more about choosing the right treatment plan for you with [Choosing Wisely®](#), a program that promotes important conversations about appropriate care choices.

