

## A Doctor's Perspective: Making the Most of Your Visit

### Excerpt from [The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Man](#)

Have you ever left the doctor's office wishing you had more time? Wondering if your doctor really listened to you or understood your symptoms? Would you like the inside scoop on how to maximize your time at the doctor's office? Lean in and I'll tell you.

**First, understand where your doctor is coming from.** Doctors haven't received a raise from Medicare in 20 years. In addition, the reporting requirements from Medicare and the time required to document care in the electronic medical record have forced physicians to spend more and more time on paperwork. In order to pay the bills, doctors have to see more patients in a day. This translates into appointments that are fifteen minutes or less. If you spend this time talking to your doctor about the weather or your pet cat, you're wasting valuable time. To maximize your visit, you need to stay focused on why you're there.

**Be clear about the purpose of your visit.** So, when you make your appointment, explain clearly why you've come to see the doctor and make sure that your doctor accepts your insurance (actually, you can save a few minutes by asking about insurance before you make your appointment).

**Come to the appointment prepared.** You don't want your doctor to spend time asking obvious questions that you already know they're going to ask. Prepare that information for them in advance of your visit. I love it when patients hand me their notes. I use my voice dictation system to quickly summarize the pertinent findings, and then move on to the second- and third-level questions that allow me to form a diagnosis and treatment plan.

If this is a visit to a new physician, write out your medical history. The website [HIVE80.com](http://HIVE80.com) has a form that you can use for this purpose. In order for your doctor to do their job, you must be honest. Be sure to include:

- Any medical issues and prior diagnoses
- Surgeries
- A list of your medications and supplements
- Allergies
- Your family's medical history
- Any personal history of smoking, drinking, or drugs
- Bring any earlier records from other physicians that you have seen for similar issues, and any lab tests, X-rays, or other studies.

**Bring a description of your symptoms.** Write a detailed list of your symptoms and when they started. For example, “The pain in my lower back started 5 days ago when I lifted a sofa. At first, the pain was a 10 out of 10 pains but now it’s 5 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 when I stand and better when I lie on my right side. I’ve taken Advil with some relief, and also use an ice pack.”

**Bring an advocate.** It’s OK to take notes or even to record the appointment so that you can remember what the doctor said. It’s also fine to bring a family member, a friend, or a medical advocate who can help you to remember key information. Sometimes patients will even call a family member to listen in. Make sure your family member knows about the appointment in advance. One time I spoke to my patient’s son while he was taking a shower.

**Ask for clarification.** Never be embarrassed to ask for more information. Sometimes doctors use medical terminology that’s unfamiliar, but it’s important that you understand what your physician is recommending and why.

**Get copies of your records at each visit.** We encourage you to keep detailed records of your medical care. So always ask for a copy of the results of any test the doctor orders for you. Today most tests are available as a PDF, which makes it easier to save, organize, and find your records. Be an advocate for yourself. Your doctor takes care of thousands of patients. It is hard for them to remember all the details for every patient.

- Ask your doctor to explain any test results to you.
- Request a copy of your test results for your files (either a photocopy or a digital version).
- 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 have just received a diagnosis, what are your treatment options? And write down the answers!
- If you have 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 is working?
- What happens if you miss a dose?

You can also ask whether your doctor recommends any specific reading materials or websites about your condition. Ask the doctor for written information on any medication, procedure, or test that you'll be undergoing.

**Find out the best way to contact your doctor**, if you have any other questions or problems, who's the best person to contact, day or night? Is there a secure email address or phone number that you can call? Personally, I have an email address that I respond to every day.

Be sure to answer your healthcare provider's questions honestly and completely. This is no time to be shy or to be keeping secrets. Even the smallest details could make the difference between life and death. Here are some additional questions you should ask your provider:

- What changes do I need to make in my lifestyle, including diet modification and physical activity level?
- Will I still be able to work?
- Can I still have sex?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help me feel better—would I benefit from seeing a nutritionist, an acupuncturist, or a chiropractor?
- What other lifestyle changes could improve my symptoms?
- What are the most important signs that I'm getting worse or at risk of a flare?
- What are the key symptoms I should monitor to stay on top of my situation?
- At what point do I call you or the nurse-on-call?
- What symptoms indicate that it's time to call an ambulance or go to the emergency room?
- How often should I come in for monitoring, screening, and checkups?

***Remember: Always ask questions whenever you don't understand something. When it comes to your health, there's no such thing as a stupid question. It could make the difference between an unhealthy life and a healthy one.***

*This chapter is an excerpt from [The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Man](#). To learn more about the book or download the full copy, visit [thetwentyfirstcenturyman.com](http://thetwentyfirstcenturyman.com).*