

Expect the Best—What You and Your Doctor Can Do: Understanding What to Expect from Your Care and How to Get It

There are important elements of care that patients and their families should expect to get as part of good primary care. This list describes areas in which you should expect the best from your primary care practice, and the actions you and your doctor can take to make sure that you get it.

When you know what to expect, you can take action. Use this checklist to work with your doctor to make sure you get the best quality health care for you and your family.

1. **Expect that your doctor takes the time to give you clear instructions on what to do to take care of your medical problem, including what to do if your symptoms get worse or come back.**

What You Can Do	What Your Doctor Can Do
<p>Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers. Before your appointment, make a list of all your questions. During the appointment, take notes of what the doctor says. You might also want to bring someone with you to help ask questions, listen, and remember. Let your doctor know if you are confused or do not understand.</p> <p>Give complete and accurate information. This includes answering all the doctor’s questions about your health. Your doctor will want to know about any symptoms, including when they started, what they feel like, and how long they last. It helps if you think about the answers to these questions ahead of time.</p> <p>Speak up if you feel that your doctor is not showing you respect or spending enough time with you. It can be hard to speak up about concerns like these. You might begin by telling your doctor that you have specific questions you would like to ask.</p>	<p>Clearly explain medical problems and instructions about what to do to take care of the problem(s). When you go to the doctor because of a medical problem, your doctor should explain: what the problem is, or might be; how to diagnose the problem; ways you can care for yourself; what medicines to take and how to take them; and when you can expect to feel better.</p> <p>Listen carefully. Your doctor should pay close attention to what you say to understand your medical problem and make sure you understand follow-up care instructions for what to do to get better or what to do if symptoms get worse or come back.</p>

2. Expect that your doctor will be informed and up-to-date about the care you received from specialists or other health care providers to whom you are referred.

What You Can Do	What Your Doctor Can Do
<p>Ask how the specialist or other health care provider will follow-up with your primary care doctor. Ask for copies of any letters or other reports that the specialist sends to your doctor.</p> <p>Let your doctor know about other doctors or health care providers you see. This includes specialists you chose to see but were not referred to, including chiropractors, therapists and others providers such as healers and herbalists. Talk with your doctor about your visit and any treatments or medications that were prescribed.</p>	<p>Follow-up with specialists. When your primary care doctor refers you to a specialist, he or she should know about the care and advice you were given by the specialist. This includes knowing about any tests or treatments you received, new medicines you were prescribed, and if or when you need to see the specialist again.</p>

3. When your doctor orders a test, such as a blood test or x-ray, expect that your doctor’s office will follow-up to give you the test results.

What You Can Do	What Your Doctor Can Do
<p>Find out when you will hear about test results. Call the doctor’s office if you do not get test results when expected. It is much better to learn about test results than simply assume that “no news is good news.”</p>	<p>Give test results in a timely and sensitive manner. When your doctor sends you for a test, you should be told when and how you will get its results. Whether your doctor or someone else from the office contacts you directly, you should learn your test results as soon as possible and in a manner that respects your values, beliefs and concerns.</p>

4. Expect that your doctor will know the important information about your medical history.

What You Can Do	What Your Doctor Can Do
<p>Give your doctor complete and accurate information. This includes current health problems, as well as your medical history (medications, surgery and illnesses). The doctor may also want to know about the medical history of your close family members. Make a list of important information you want to discuss before you see a doctor for the first time.</p>	<p>Learn about your medical history and current health problems. The first time a doctor sees you as a new patient, your doctor should ask about your medical history. In future visits, the doctor should update your medical history with information about current health problems and concerns.</p> <p>Have a record-keeping system that makes it easy to find your health information. Your doctor’s office should have systems that make it easy to find your past and present health information. This is needed whether doctors meet with you in the office, talk by phone, or consult with specialists about your treatment and care.</p>