

Checklist: Working with Your Doctor to Improve Your Care

You can build a healthier relationship with your doctor and get the most from every visit by using these simple tips.

- Give complete and accurate information.** This includes answering all the doctor's questions about your health. If you have a medical problem, your doctor will want to know about all your symptoms including when they started, what they feel like, and how long they last. It helps if you think about these questions ahead of time so you can give complete and accurate answers.
- Ask all your questions and make sure you understand the answers.** Before your appointment, make a list of all the questions you want to ask. 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 what he or she says.
- Talk about what is important to you—even if the doctor does not ask.** This includes religious beliefs or other ideas you have about treatments and care.
- Talk with your doctor about lifestyle choices that affect your health.** This includes foods you eat, how much exercise you get, and whether you smoke, drink, or use street drugs. It is important to talk with your doctor about these choices even if it is awkward or embarrassing to do so.
- Let your doctor know about other doctors or health providers you see.** This includes specialists, chiropractors, therapists, and others providers such as healers and herbalists. Talk with your doctor about why you see these providers, what happened during the visit, and any treatments or medications that were prescribed.
- Discuss benefits and risks before you make a treatment choice.** Many times, there is more than one way to treat an illness or health problem. Talk with your doctor and learn as much as you want to know about the benefits (how treatments can help) and risks (possible problems or side-effects) of each treatment choice.
- Find out when you will hear about test results.** Call your doctor's office if you do not get test results when expected. It is much better to learn about test results than to assume that not hearing your test results means that there is no problem.
- Make and keep all appointments, even when you are feeling well.** One of the best ways to stay healthy is to follow your doctor's advice for follow-up care and prevention.
- Know that there may be times when your own doctor cannot see you.** If you need an appointment but your doctor is not available, you may be seen by other professionals on your doctor's team.

For more ideas on how you can work with your doctor to improve your care experience and for additional resources and information about health care quality, please visit mhqp.org.

Massachusetts Health Quality Partners is the only independent organization to collect and publicly report statewide results for patients' experiences with their primary care providers. By bringing together physicians, consumers, health plans, researchers, policymakers and other health care leaders, MHQP develops reliable information to help physicians improve the quality of care they provide for their patients and help consumers take an active role in making informed decisions about their health care.