

How You Can Help Your Doctor Take Better Care of You and Your Family!

Bonita Coe, M.D., M.B.A.
Department of General Internal Medicine
The Cleveland Clinic
9500 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44195
216-445-1789

Staying healthy should be a part of your everyday activities. Although there can be many processes that happen to your body over the course of your lifetime that you have no control over, there are many things that you can do to optimize your health status. Helping your doctor help you is an important part of health maintenance and disease prevention.

First, **pick a primary care physician**. Having a doctor who already knows you and/or your family is critical, especially in times of a medical emergency or urgent medical issue. A primary care physician is a doctor that cares for the general health of patients. Internal Medicine and/or Family Medicine doctors provide primary care for adults. Pediatrics and/or Family Medicine doctors provide primary care for children. Obstetricians and Gynecologists are also considered primary care physicians for young adult and adult women who are pregnant or have gynecologic issues that need to be addressed.

Keep a medical folder for yourself and each member of your family. Write down the names of previous doctors, medical conditions, immunizations, procedures, treatments and medications. This kind of folder is a great way to keep your medical history, so that you do not forget the details of important medical events that have occurred. This folder can be given to your children once they reach adulthood, so that they may have their childhood records which are important to have in their adult lives.

Know the medical history of your parents, brothers, sisters and children. Often we are reluctant to let our family members know about the medical conditions that we are facing. It is important to tell your family members what diseases that you have (or had) so that they can let their physician know about family medical history that may have a great impact on current and future health. Family histories of cancer, depression, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, neurological diseases and bleeding problems are especially important.

Know your insurance benefits. Remember to read your insurance booklet. Many people have medical insurance, but don't know what benefits are covered and not covered. By not being familiar with your insurance coverage, you may be missing out on medical benefits, supplies and equipment that you are eligible for.

Take advantage of chronic disease management programs offered by your medical insurance provider. Disease management programs for diabetes, asthma, heart disease and high blood pressure are offered many insurance carriers and provide individualized care that helps your doctor take care of your chronic diseases better.

Keep all of your doctor's appointments. Missed follow-up appointments put you at risk for having undesirable complications to the medical issue(s) being followed. If you must miss an appointment, make sure that you call your doctor's office to reschedule the visit.

Bring your medications bottles to each physician visit. Having your medication bottles with you while you are in your office visit helps your doctor make sure that you are taking the correct medication and doses.

Be sure to tell your physician about psychological stress that you are dealing with. Psychological stress and problems, including depression and anxiety, can have a great impact on your health. Do not be embarrassed about talking about these issues with your doctor.

Promptly get the laboratory, blood tests and/or procedures done that your doctor orders. The results of these important tests help your doctor better assess your health status and give you and your family the best recommendations about how you to stay healthy.

Make sure your doctor or someone on your doctor's staff gives you your test results, either in person, by telephone or written communication. Do not assume that no news is good news. You should strive to have a good understanding of the results of the tests that have been done on you.

Make sure you ask questions about anything about your medical care that you don't understand. Write down questions as you think of them, so you can remember to ask your doctor during your office visit.

An informed patient is a healthier patient!!