

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Ask Your Doctor Information

<https://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/patient-involvement/ask-your-doctor/index.html>

The 10 Questions You Should Know

Questions Are the Answer

A simple question can help you feel better, let you take better care of yourself, or save your life. The questions below can get you started.

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?

Before Your Appointment

You can make sure you get the best possible care by being an active member of your health care team. Being involved means being prepared and asking questions.

Asking questions about your diagnoses, treatments, and medicines can improve the quality, safety, and effectiveness of your health care.

Taking steps before your medical appointments will help you to make the most of your time with your doctor and health care team.

Prepare your questions

Time is limited during doctor visits. Prepare for your appointment by thinking about what you want to do during your next visit. Do you want to:

- Talk about a health problem?
- Get or change a medicine?

- Get medical tests?
- Talk about surgery or treatment options?

Write down your questions to bring to your appointment. The answers can help you make better decisions, get good care, and feel better about your health care.

During Your Appointment

You can make sure you get the best possible care by being an active member of your health care team. Being involved means being prepared and asking questions.

During your appointment, make sure to ask the questions you prepared before your appointment. Start by asking the ones that are most important to you.

To get the most from your visit, tell the nurse or person at the front desk that you have questions for your doctor. If your doctor does not ask you if you have questions, ask your doctor when the best time would be to ask them.

Understand the answers and next steps

Asking questions is important but so is making sure you hear—and understand—the answers you get. Take notes. Or bring someone to your appointment to help you understand and remember what you heard. If you don't understand or are confused, ask your doctor to explain the answer again.

It is very important to understand the plan or next steps that your doctor recommends. Ask questions to make sure you understand what your doctor wants you to do.

The questions you may want to ask will depend on whether your doctor gives you a diagnosis; recommends a treatment, medical test, or surgery; or gives you a prescription for medicine.

Questions could include:

- What is my diagnosis?
- What are my treatment options? What are the benefits of each option? What are the side effects?
- Will I need a test? What is the test for? What will the results tell me?
- What will the medicine you are prescribing do? How do I take it? Are there any side effects?
- Why do I need surgery? Are there other ways to treat my condition? How often do you perform this surgery?
- Do I need to change my daily routine?

Find out what you are to do next. Ask for written instructions, brochures, videos, or Web sites that may help you learn more.

After Your Appointment

You can make sure you get the best possible care by being an active member of your health care team. Being involved means being prepared and asking questions.

After you meet with your doctor, you will need to follow his or her instructions to keep your health on track.

Your doctor may have you fill a prescription or make another appointment for tests, lab work, or a follow-up visit. It is important for you to follow your doctor's instructions.

It also is important to call your doctor if you are unclear about any instructions or have more questions.

Prioritize your questions

Create a list of follow-up questions to ask if you:

- Have a health problem
- Need to get or change a medicine
- Need a medical test
- Need to have surgery

Other times to call your doctor

There are other times when you should follow up on your care and call your doctor. Call your doctor:

- If you experience any side effects or other problems with your medicines.
- If your symptoms get worse after seeing the doctor.
- If you receive any new prescriptions or start taking any over-the-counter medicines.
- To get results of any tests you've had. Do not assume that no news is good news.
- To ask about test results you do not understand.

Your questions help your doctor and health care team learn more about you. Your doctor's answers to your questions can help you make better decisions, receive a higher level of care, avoid medical harm, and feel better about your health care. Your questions can also lead to better results for your health.