Your Doctor
What Happens At the Doctor’s Office?

People see doctors when they are sick. They also see doctors when they are well for checkups to help them stay healthy.

When you go to a doctor’s office, first you tell the person at the front desk your name. You may need to fill out some forms. You will wait until the nurse calls you. Then you will see the doctor.

Going to the doctor can be scary, especially if you do not know what to expect. Sometimes it is hard to describe your symptoms. Sometimes it may be hard to understand what the doctor is telling you.

This chapter will answer these questions.

- What happens at the doctor’s office?
- What can I do before I see the doctor?
- What questions do I ask the doctor?
- How do I describe my symptoms?
- How do I fill out a health history form?
When you go to the doctor’s office, you will:

• Sign in. This means you tell the person at the front desk your name and why you are there.

• Fill out some forms. You may need to fill out a health history form.

• Wait in the waiting room until the nurse calls you.

• Go with the nurse to an examining room. The nurse will weigh you, measure your height, and take your blood pressure.

• The nurse may ask you to undress and wear a gown that will allow the doctor to examine you more easily. The nurse will leave the room while you change into the gown.

• Wait in the examining room until the doctor knocks on the door and comes in.

• Tell the doctor why you are there. You will need to describe your symptoms. The doctor will then examine you.

• Talk with your doctor about why you are there.

Before you see the Doctor, you will:

1. Sign in
2. Fill out forms
3. Wait for someone to call your name
4. Get weighed and measured
5. Put on the examining gown
Before you go to the Doctor

Here are some things you can do before you go to the doctor’s office to help you and your doctor understand each other better:

• Write down the medicines you take or bring your medicines with you (prescription medicines AND over-the-counter medicines).

• Write down all the health problems you have ever had, and the symptoms you are feeling now.

• Practice describing your symptoms in English. Practice with a friend or family member.

• If you have a picture dictionary or bilingual phrase book, take it with you. If the doctor does not understand you, point to what you are trying to say.

• Ask a friend to go with you to help you understand what to do and say.

• Call the doctor’s office and ask for a medical interpreter to help you and your doctor communicate.
Learn These Words

Knowing these words about the body will help you describe your symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• chin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hands and Arms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• thumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• wrist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shoulder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legs and Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• thigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• knee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• foot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
External Body Areas

- neck
- shoulders
- back
- buttocks
- head
- chest
- waist

Internal Body Parts

- spleen
- kidneys
- brain
- lungs
- pancreas
- liver
- heart
- colon
- stomach

Common Feelings

- fine, great
- good
- OK
- so-so
- not so good
- sick
- in pain
How Do I Describe My Symptoms?

Use these charts to practice describing your symptoms in English before you go to the doctor.

### Common Symptoms Chart I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>What it means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gas, fart</td>
<td>Bad-smelling air comes from the bowels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>You cannot feel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tingling</td>
<td>You feel prickling in your body or your skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizure</td>
<td>A sudden, short attack of shaking and you become unconscious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortness of breath</td>
<td>You cannot get enough air. It is hard to breathe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheezing</td>
<td>You make a whistling sound when you breathe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Common Symptoms Chart II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>What it means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congestion</td>
<td>Your nose is full, it’s hard to breathe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Your stool is too hard and does not come out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>A quick, noisy push of air from your throat or lungs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>Your stool is watery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Symptom</td>
<td>What it means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>You feel faint, lightheaded, shaky or wobbly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>You feel tired all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>Your body is too hot, your temperature is too high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Pain or ache in your head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Itching</td>
<td>You want to rub or scratch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>You feel like you need to throw up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>You feel an ache, hurt, stinging, or soreness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rash</td>
<td>You have red marks, bumps, or spots on your skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sneeze</td>
<td>A quick push of air out of your nose and mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sore throat</td>
<td>Your throat hurts, it’s hard to swallow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
<td>Pain or ache in your stomach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vomit</td>
<td>To be sick, to throw up from your stomach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Did the Doctor Say?

It is easier to understand your doctor if you know the words and phrases doctors use. This chart shows some common words and phrases doctors use, and ways you can answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When the doctor says:</th>
<th>The doctor means:</th>
<th>Some ways you can answer:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a family history of cancer?</td>
<td>Have your parents, grandparents, brothers, or sisters ever had cancer?</td>
<td>No. I don’t know. Yes, my mother had breast cancer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced any bad headaches?</td>
<td>Have you had bad headaches? Have you felt bad headaches?</td>
<td>No. Yes. Yes, sometimes. Yes, a lot (often). Yes, all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever had a reaction to this medicine?</td>
<td>Did it make you sick? Did it make you feel different?</td>
<td>No. Yes. Yes, it made me dizzy. Yes, it gave me a rash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want you to schedule a follow-up.</td>
<td>I want to see you again. Please make another appointment.</td>
<td>OK. When do you want to see me again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to write you a script.</td>
<td>I’m going to give you a prescription for some medicine.</td>
<td>OK. How much do I take and how often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to give you a referral.</td>
<td>I want you to see a special doctor. I’ll give you her name and phone number.</td>
<td>Thank you. I will call to make an appointment right away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Questions Should I Ask the Doctor?

You have a right and responsibility to ask your doctor questions. This means you can and you should ask questions.

Ask these 3 questions each time you see the doctor:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

It is your doctor’s job to explain clearly the answers to these questions. It is your job to be sure you understand the answers before you leave the doctor’s office.

What Do I Say If I Don’t Understand?

1. Excuse me. Please repeat.
2. Please say that again.
3. Please tell me one more time.
4. What does that mean?
5. Explain it more, please.
6. Please show me a picture.
7. Please show me that word in my dictionary.
8. Please write down what you are saying.
What is a Health History Form?

A health history form is also sometimes called a medical history form. A health history form will ask you to describe the following.

- Your health habits.
- Health problems you have now or had in the past.
- Times that you were in the hospital and why.
- Any operations (surgery) you have had.
- Illnesses or diseases family members have or had.
- What medicines you take.
Filling Out a Health History Form

It is very important to fill out the medical history form correctly. Your doctor can help you much better if he or she knows your true health history.

- **DO NOT** just circle “No” if you do not understand something.
- If you don’t understand, **ASK** for help.
- **Get to the appointment** early so you have time to fill it out.

To help you fill out a health history form, make a chart like the one below before you go to the doctor so you have the information you need.

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### My Health History Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicines I take</th>
<th>Health problems I have, or had before (include allergies to medications)</th>
<th>Family health history, health problems my family has had</th>
<th>Surgeries I have had, or times I have stayed in the hospital</th>
<th>Questions I want to ask</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="medicines.png" alt="Medicines" /></td>
<td><img src="health_problems.png" alt="Health Problems" /></td>
<td><img src="family_health.png" alt="Family Health" /></td>
<td><img src="surgeries.png" alt="Surgeries" /></td>
<td><img src="questions.png" alt="Questions" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Check Your Learning

**What is a health history form?**

- A form you fill out to apply for health insurance
- A form you fill out so you can ask your doctor questions
- A form you fill out to tell your doctor the health problems you and your family have or had
Key Points

• Ask your doctor questions.
• If you don’t understand, ask for help!
• Know your health history.

How Can a Doctor Help?

• A doctor can help you stay healthy. Talk to your doctor about your health and how to stay healthy.
• A doctor can help you take care of health problems. Ask your doctor questions about your health problems.
• Your doctor can help you understand. If you don’t understand something, ask your doctor to explain it again.

Dialog

**Doctor:** You have some mild hypertension. I’m going to write you a script for some medication.

**Patient:** Excuse me, but I don’t understand. What is hypertension?

**Doctor:** Hypertension means high blood pressure. Your blood pressure is a little too high, so I want you to take some medicine.

**Patient:** Oh, Ok. And what is a script?

**Doctor:** A script is a short way of saying prescription.

**Patient:** Ok, thank you for explaining that.

**Doctor:** No problem. I’m glad you asked!
How Can I Learn More?
Visit these websites to learn more about talking with your doctor.

Information
Healthcare Basics
youtube.com/watch?v=0WKVyoJJSbA
Ask Me 3
npsf.org/askme3
Talking to Your Doctor
goo.gl/n1dFVc
Questions to Ask Your Doctor
ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/patient-involvement/ask-your-doctor/index.html

Activities
Reep Health Vocabulary Practice
reepworld.org/englishpractice/index.htm
Describing Symptoms to Your Doctor – ESOL Podcast
goo.gl/HViUA2
Visiting the Doctor: Lessons in Language and Culture
www.literacynet.org/vtd
Understanding Medical Words: A Tutorial
medlineplus.gov/medicalwords/

Free or Low Cost Services
NeedyMeds
needymeds.org/free_clinics.taf