

COMMUNICATING WITH HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Living with chronic pain can often involve meeting with a number of health care providers. In some situations, communication may go smoothly, and you will be able to have open discussions with your provider. In other situations, you may struggle to effectively discuss your health issues. Often, your health care provider will need or collaborate with you to create treatment plans or make decisions. It can be useful to know how to communicate effectively with health care providers to ensure you're getting the best care possible. Here are some strategies that can help.

MAKE A LIST OF YOUR CONCERNS

- A few days in advance of your health care appointment, track your symptoms or other concerns. Be as accurate as you can and use detail as you might not know what will be important later.
- Make note of which symptoms are causing you the most concern.

SPEAK UP

- Communicate your most pressing concerns at the beginning of your appointment so your health care provider can keep them in mind while reviewing diagnostic information or examining you.

LISTEN AND ASK QUESTIONS

- If your health care provider says something you don't understand, ask them to repeat or clarify the information.
- Tell your health care provider if you don't understand a word or phrase they use, or when their advice is unclear.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand why a particular treatment is being recommended or why another treatment is not being offered,
- Recommendations from health care providers are only useful if you're able to put them into practice. Tell your provider if you have any concerns about being able to follow through on their advice.

- Take time to make decisions about care. If you're uncertain about a treatment option and the situation isn't urgent, ask your health care provider for a few days to discuss it with your friends or family.

DON'T MINIMIZE THE SYMPTOMS OR SITUATION

- If you make remarks that downplay your symptoms such as "it's just a little cough," or "my lack of sleep feels normal to me now," it might lead your doctor to come to the same conclusion. Be as accurate as you can when communicating your symptoms and how much they bother you.

PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENTS

- Scheduled appointments are the best time to ask questions so it's useful to prepare a list before your health care visit.
- Remember to make your list of concerns in advance and to take it in with you.
- When living with ongoing pain, memory and concentration can be a problem. When you attend an appointment, think about asking a family member or friend to come with you to help you take notes.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION STYLES

- Each person has a unique communication style. Find a way in which you are comfortable communicating with your health care provider. This can help you feel more confident about the quality of health care you're receiving.

AT THE END OF YOUR APPOINTMENT

There are three questions you can ask at the end of an appointment to make sure you know what you need to do for your health and why:

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

RESOURCES

- <https://www.liveplanbc.ca/pain-education/communication-strategies/how-to-communicate-well-with-healthcare-providers>
- <https://www.liveplanbc.ca/pain-education/communication-strategies/tips-for-talking-with-healthcare-providers>
- <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-can-i-communicate-effectively>
- <https://www.painweek.org/media/video/communication-and-pain-management-whats-missing>