



Full Version 5. Talk with Your Doctor

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*You, as a patient, need to talk with your doctor about your healthcare needs, expectations and wishes.
If you are informed and involved, you are more likely to be satisfied with your healthcare.*

What are your patient responsibilities?

- Complete the *It's Safe to Ask* medication card from the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS), available at: www.safetoask.ca
- List all medications, vitamins, herbs, supplements and over-the-counter medications.
- Write down your medication doses, how often you take them, and why.
- Give one copy of your medication card to the doctor and keep one copy with you.
- Arrive early to fill out any forms.
- Have your Manitoba Health Card ready.
- Bring any related medical records or have them sent ahead of time.
- Bring your completed Health Care Directive. Go over the key points with your doctor.
- Bring a completed and signed Patient Advocate Form. Leave a copy with your doctor. Ask your advocate to go with you, if you think you will need help. See *It's Safe to Ask* at www.safetoask.ca
- Ask what the doctor's expectations are of patients.
- Share your needs, expectations and wishes about your healthcare.

What is the best way to explain your concerns and symptoms?

- State your concerns or symptoms as clearly as possible.
- Be clear on dates when symptoms started. Keeping a health journal helps with this task.
- Describe when the symptoms are worse or better.
- Ask what you are to do, why, and what the treatment is.
- Ask about side effects of any prescribed medicines.
- Listen carefully and learn more.

Where can you go to learn more about your health?

- Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest some resources.
- Look for reliable information on the Internet or get books at the library.
- Ask your patient advocate to help you. Library staff can also assist.
- Go to www.safetoask.ca and www.mbips.ca

What questions might you ask your doctor?

- What is my health problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why do I need to do this?
- What else could it be?
- What caused this problem?
- What will we do to treat this problem?

What can you do after the visit if you have more questions?

- If you forget to ask a key question, call the doctor's office right away.
- Respectfully ask the nurse to pass your questions on to the doctor. Or ask if there is a time you can call back and speak with the doctor.
- Ask the nurse if she is able to answer your questions.
- Make a follow-up appointment to have your tests results explained.

What questions might you ask in specific situations?

The following are some questions to ask in specific situations.

If tests are recommended:

- What tests do I need and why?
- What do the tests involve?
- How do I prepare for the tests?
- What are the risks and side effects?
- How long is the wait to have these tests done?
- Can I go elsewhere for the test?
- What do I do if I do not hear from someone about booking my tests?
- Will the test be done sooner if my condition worsens?
- When will I know the test results?
- Will I have to take the tests again?
- Are there other tests or options for someone my age?

If treatments are discussed:

- What is my health plan? See *Know Your Health Plan*.
- What are my treatment choices?
- What are the benefits and risks of each treatment?
- What are the side effects?
- Which treatment has the least side effects?
- How effective is the treatment? Will it be repeated?
- Which treatment is used most often?
- What if the treatment fails? What happens next?
- What if I refuse the treatments?

If a follow-up visit is needed:

- Will I need to schedule future appointments?
- Whom do I call if medication side effects occur?
- What is this person's contact information?
- Should I call if my condition gets worse?
- When should I go to an Emergency Room (ER) at a hospital?

If a second opinion is needed:

- You have the right as a patient in Manitoba to a second opinion.
- You can say you are unsure about what to do. You wish to get the views of another provider to give you peace of mind.

How do you enhance your patient-doctor relationship?

Open and honest talk with your doctor can lead to higher levels of trust, patient satisfaction and patient safety. The best patient and doctor relations occur when you:

- Share your health needs, concerns and wishes openly.
- Ask questions.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Make decisions together.

What is your patient-doctor relationship like now?

Think about how you relate to your doctor.

- Are you nervous about asking your doctor questions?
 - Write down your questions. Read them to the doctor.
 - Bring a friend or advocate with you. They can ask the questions for you.
- Do you have trouble understanding the medical words your doctor uses?
 - Do not worry.
 - Say “This is new to me. Please explain again.”
 - Ask more questions.
 - Ask the doctor if there is a pamphlet with pictures to explain the facts.
 - Bring a patient advocate with you.
- Do you feel your concerns are not being heard?
 - Make notes at home.
 - Tell the doctor your needs and expectations.
 - Share your concerns in a clear way when you meet.
 - Ask questions and take notes on the answers.
 - Be involved in your healthcare talks.

- Do you feel rushed at the doctor’s office?

Doctors have many patients, crowded waiting rooms and visits don’t last long.

Make the best use of the doctor’s time.

- Write down your symptoms. Share the most important symptom first. (Too many symptoms may cause confusion.)
- Answer all questions when the doctor reviews your symptoms.



- If you have more than one health problem, choose the most important one.
 - Write down questions from the previous visit, if you need to follow-up.
 - Practise what you will say before the visit.
 - Ask your questions.
 - Take notes.
 - Bring your patient advocate.
 - Do not expect to deal with all your health concerns in one visit.
 - Ask about the doctor's health plan for you.
 - Take a personal calendar to set a follow-up visit.
- Do you wait a long time before you see your doctor?
 - Bring a book or something to do while you wait.
 - Be patient.
 - Call ahead and ask how long the wait will be. If possible, adjust your arrival time.
 - You are waiting to see one doctor, but your doctor has many patients to see in one day.

What can you do if you need to find or change doctors?

If you are looking for a family doctor, call the Family Doctor Connection line:

Phone 786-7111 in Winnipeg
1-866-690-8260 toll-free
TTY/TDD 774-8618
1-800-855-0511 toll-free
(Manitoba Relay Services)

If you need to change doctors:

- Speak with your doctor if you feel things can get better. Share your needs openly. Ask what you can do to have better conversations.
- If this is not possible or you are not comfortable, find a different doctor.
- Check to see if your community has other doctors that you can see.
- You can call your regional health authority: www.gov.mb.ca/health/rha/contact.html or check the Manitoba Health website at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/guide/4.html>

Resources

Canadian Resources

- Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) websites: www.safetoask.ca and www.mbips.ca
- *Finding Your Voice: Our Journey with Cancer through the Health Care System*. Dawn M. White. Winnipeg, MB: Friesens; 2009. www.dawnmwhite.ca
- *Info Health Guide to Health Services in Manitoba: What Health Services are Available to you in Manitoba?* Manitoba; 2009. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/guide/4.html>
- *Going to the Doctor*. Winnipeg, MB: Literacy Partners of Manitoba; 2010. www.plainlanguage.mb.literacy.ca/resources/GoingtotheDoctor.pdf
- *Health Talk: How to Communicate with Your Doctor*. Mary F. Hawkins. Toronto, ON: Macmillan Canada; 2000.
- *Navigating Canada's Health Care: A User Guide to Getting the Care You Need*. Michael Decter and Francesca Grosso. Penguin Canada; 2008.
- *Nothing About Me, Without Me! A Practical Guide for Avoiding Medical Errors*. Melinda Ashton and Linda Richards. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing; 2003.

Books

- *100 Questions and Answers about Communicating with your Healthcare Provider*. John A. King and Cynthia R. King. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2009.
- *Engaging Patients as Safety Partners*. Patrice L. Spath (Editor). Chicago; Health Forum Inc.; 2008.
- *Family Centered Patient Advocacy: A Training Manual*. Ilene Corina and Eve Shapiro (Editors). Wantagh, NY: Pulse of New York; 2007. <http://pulseofny.org/resources/FCPAP%2010%2029%20advocate.pdf>
- *Patients as Partners: How to Involve Patients and Their Families in their Own Care*, Meghan McGreevey (Editor). Joint Commission Resources; 2006.
- *You The Smart Patient: An Insider's Handbook for Getting the Best Treatment*. Michael F. Roizen and Mehmet C. Ox. New York, NY: Free Press; 2006.

