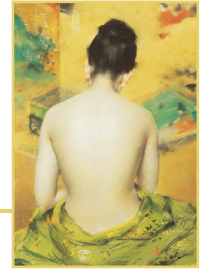


# Talking to Your Healthcare Professional

*Women's*  
Healthcare Forum

[www.womenshealthcareforum.com](http://www.womenshealthcareforum.com)



## Before the Appointment

**Be prepared. Prepare for your visit by organizing ahead of time.** Write notes about any symptoms or problems you've experienced since your last visit. Be specific; don't just say, "My arm hurts." Describe what happens when you move your arm in certain ways—when you dry your hair or get laundry out of the washing machine, for example. Jot down how often you experience pain, how long the pain lasts, and what you do to make it go away.

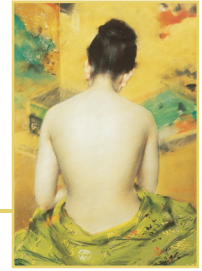
Not having enough time can be a big problem when you're seeing your healthcare professional. Taking charge and being organized can improve the quality of your visit. Keeping a notebook of your health can help you save time. Try to keep track of the following items by writing them down:

1. Symptoms—location, duration, and what they prevent you from doing; write down what brings them on, what makes them worse, and what makes them better
2. List of all your healthcare professionals and why you see them.
3. List of all your medications, including their strengths and your dosing schedule. **IMPORTANT:** List all the vitamins, herbs, minerals, supplements, and over the counter medicines you take, even if only occasionally.
4. List of prior and current medical conditions and surgeries. If you went to the emergency room for anything, list the date and reason.
5. List of tests you've taken in the past 24 months including mammograms, blood tests, and x-rays.

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## During the Appointment

It is a good idea to always take someone with you when you see your healthcare professional to listen, help take notes and/or clarify something you might not understand. But don't just show up, be prepared.

- 1. Expectations: Tell your healthcare professional how much information you want and what you want out of the visit.** Let your clinician know what you expect to happen at your visit. Do you want to know the cause of your problem or just how to manage it? Do you want to know how the diagnosis will be made and how accurate the test is for diagnosing your condition? Do you want to know about treatment options or just the treatments your clinician selects for you? Learning about your condition can help you become a better patient in identifying certain signs and symptoms that might help your healthcare professional help you. If you want to learn more about your condition, ask him or her to give you some information—or perhaps to recommend a Website if you have access to a computer—so you can read and learn more. Be sure you are only looking at trustworthy sites such as [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov) or [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov); both are reliable government sites. Look for sites where the content has been written by healthcare professionals and is updated regularly.
- 2. Speak Up: Be honest; don't be afraid or embarrassed.** You are a major component of the team that is going to make you better, so you have a responsibility to trust and talk openly about everything that could have an impact on your condition. Your lifestyle is important, and you may not be proud of the fact that you smoke or use illegal substances, but you must tell the clinician the truth. If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation and don't be afraid to ask questions. It's okay to ask the person who's explaining something to you to slow down, to draw you a picture, or to repeat something. You should ask for an alternative treatment if you don't think you're going to comply with the one that's being proposed. It's also okay to think about a decision you are asked to make during an office visit or to change your mind. Keep in mind that you are the most significant partner in your own care.
- 3. No-no's: Emotions, unrealistic expectations, and anger can all get in the way of good communication.** When emotions are high, logic is low. Anger, fatigue, and frustration are all normal feelings, but reason and common sense are important to help improve communication and get positive results from your office visit. Time limitation is a factor in all medical visits so it is critical to present the facts. List your reasons for being there in the order of their importance and explain what you expect in a reasonable manner. Try not to get emotional when you present the specific information.
- 4. Before you leave: Are you satisfied?** Take a moment before you leave the office to think about what took place during your visit. Do you understand what you are supposed to do and what medication you are to take? Or are you confused? Do you need written instructions? Ask someone in the office to clarify what isn't clear to you before you leave. Leave feeling confident that you understand what just took place and you know what you need to do.