



Making the most of your medical appointments

Partner for
Quality Care

Information for a Healthy Oregon

We collaborate with patients, providers, health plans, and purchasers to measure and improve health care quality in Oregon.

A project of the Oregon Health Care Quality Corporation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Aligning Forces for Quality initiative.

Getting ready for your appointment

Make a list to take along

Take a few minutes to write down:

- **What you need to tell (or show) your doctor or other health professional.** This could include symptoms, family history, or exposure to other people who've been ill.
- **The questions you want to ask.** You know best what these questions are. For new symptoms: "Why am I feeling this way?" Or if you have an ongoing health condition, you may ask "How am I doing?" and "What else can I be doing to feel better?" (The next page has more hints on asking good questions.)
- **All medications and supplements you currently take.** That includes over-the-counter meds, prescriptions, vitamins, and herbal remedies. Even better, just put all of these things in a bag and bring it to your appointment. That way, your doctor can see all the details on the labels.
- **Any allergies you have.** Note any bad reactions you have had to medications.

Think about asking someone to go with you

Consider asking a trusted friend or family member to come with you, especially if you feel ill or have serious health problems. This person can help listen, take notes, and help you remember what was said.

Educate yourself

You may want to learn more about your symptoms or your diagnosis *before* your appointment.

Learning more helps you understand what your doctor might look for or recommend. It'll also help you know what questions you want

to ask during your appointment.

Resources: Your library, your health plan, and trustworthy websites. See our companion brochure: "How can you find trustworthy health information on the web?"



During your appointment

1. Explain why you're there.

Make sure your doctor or other health professional understands why you made this appointment.

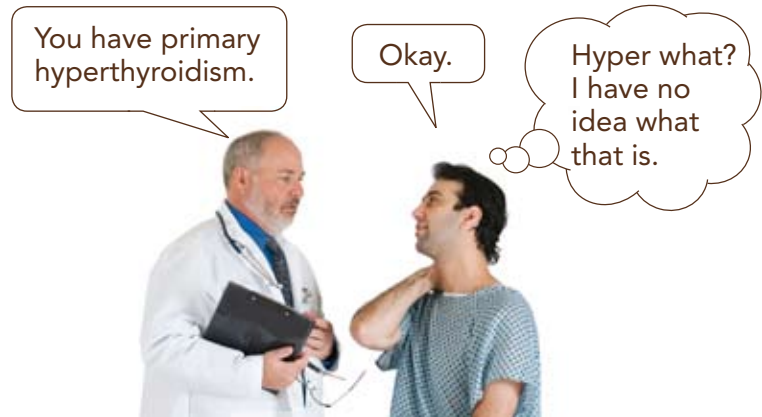
2. Answer the doctor's questions. Your clear and complete answers help the doctor figure out what might be going on.

3. Listen to your doctor's diagnosis and recommendations about what to do next. Do you understand what he or she is telling you? If questions come up, write them down.

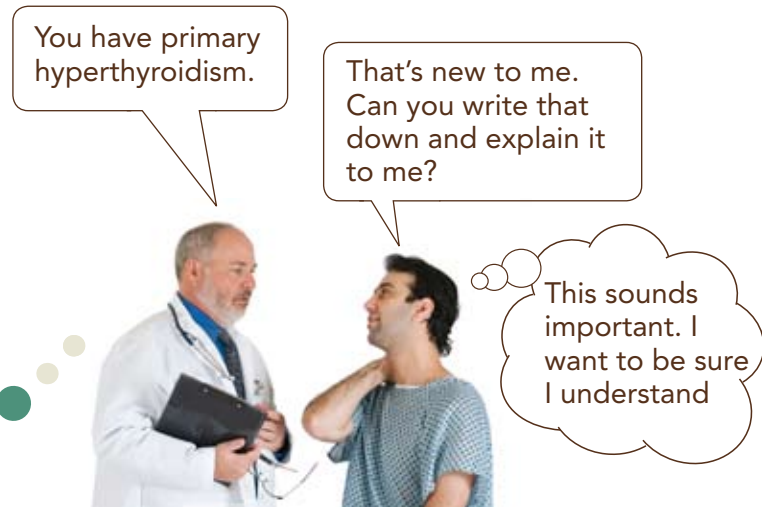
4. Your turn! Ask your questions. Here's where your list comes in. The doctor probably already answered some of your questions. Check your list and ask your other questions. Take notes.

5. Know what happens next. Before you leave, make sure you're clear about the next steps and when they need to happen.

Many people hold back on asking questions during their medical appointments. Some think it will take too much time. Or they're not sure what to say.



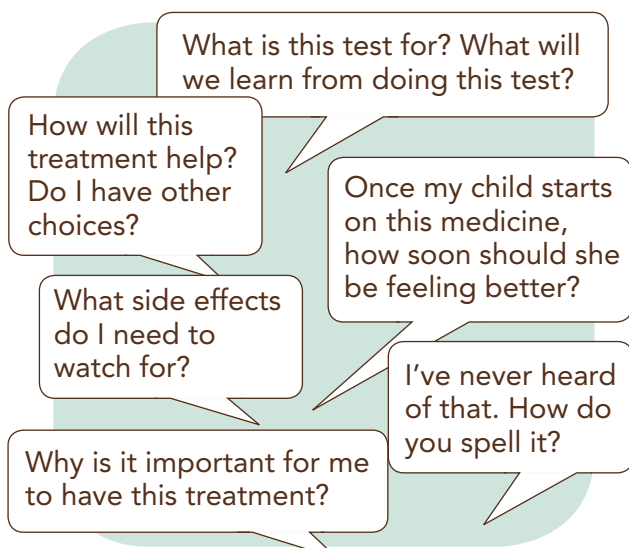
Asking questions can be hard. But remember, it's your body. You need – and deserve – to understand what your doctor or other health professional is telling you.





Following through

Here are ways to ask for more information:



Sometimes patients ask a question, but don't understand the answer, and then don't have the courage to ask again. Sound familiar? Here are ways to ask again:



1. Do your part.

You agreed to do something: Come in for a test, schedule a follow-up appointment, try a new medication. Be sure to follow through.



- 2. Watch for possible problems.** For your safety, be alert in the hours and days after you start a new medication or treatment. If you notice new symptoms or problems, let your doctor know right away.
- 3. Call back if you need to.** If you have new questions or concerns, call your doctor's office. If you were expecting to get test results or schedule tests and haven't heard from anyone, call the doctor's office.
- 4. Learn more.** Do you have a new diagnosis? A different medication? Learning more helps you do a better job of managing your own health. Ask your doctor and other health professionals for information. Health plans, websites, and support groups can also be helpful resources.