

# PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

*Use this checklist to help you become an informed and involved member of your healthcare team. The physicians, nurses and clinicians caring for you will appreciate it very much.*

## **TESTS**

- ✓ Find out why a test or treatment is needed and how it is going to help you.
- ✓ Don't hesitate to ask about your test or treatment results – including blood work, x-rays, mammograms or PAP smears.
- ✓ Ask when your doctor will get the test results, when the results will be discussed with you and by whom.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

- ✓ Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have all the important health information they might need to know about you including your overall health, past illnesses, the medications and even the vitamins and supplements you are taking.
- ✓ Become a knowledgeable health care consumer and learn about your medical condition and the treatments available.
- ✓ Know what to expect about your plan of care, medical or surgical options as well as the risks and benefits of any treatment proposed to you.

## **ASK QUESTIONS**

- ✓ Please feel free to speak up if you have questions or concerns – ask as many questions as you feel are necessary to make you feel comfortable and informed.
- ✓ Find out what to expect before, during and after tests, treatments, or surgical procedures.
- ✓ At time of discharge, have your doctor explain the treatment plan and medications you will use at home and what follow-up care you may need.

## **MEDICATIONS**

- ✓ Find out as much about the medications you are prescribed as possible – why its needed, how long should you take it, what are the side effects, is breast-feeding permitted, does it mix well with your other medications and vitamins and supplements, etc.
- ✓ Tell your doctor about any allergies or adverse reactions that you have has with other medications.
- ✓ Be sure that you are taking the correct medicine – a generic version may be labeled by another name.
- ✓ Make sure the pharmacy gives you the same medicine your doctor ordered.
- ✓ Ask the pharmacist or call you doctor if you have any questions about the medicine or the information of the label.
- ✓ Find out the best way to measure the proper dose of any liquid medicines.

## TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

### ✓ **Outline all your concerns at the start of your visit**

Knowing in advance what a patient wants to discuss helps a doctor to allot time accordingly. "It's very frustrating for both of us when a patient brings up a major concern at the end of the visit and we don't have enough time to cover it," says Gene Bishop, MD, an internist at Pennsylvania Hospital. "I don't want a patient to leave unhappy with unanswered questions."

### ✓ **Don't be shy ... talk to your doctor**

"Studies have shown that if doctors are quiet, patients will tell them 90 percent of the information they need to know," says Bishop. "I hear so much more from patients if I'm not directing their conversation."

### ✓ **Inform your doctor about your medications**

Fill your doctor in on any over-the-counter, herbal and homeopathic products as well as prescription medications. He or she needs to see the whole picture to help you effectively.

### ✓ **Ask follow-up questions**

If you don't understand something your doctor said, by all means ask for an explanation. "People shouldn't be afraid to ask their doctor questions," says Bishop. "Their doctor is there to help them understand their health."

### ✓ **Take notes**

People often get nervous during a doctor's visit and forget what their doctor is telling them. Ask your doctor to repeat what he or she said if you didn't get it down on paper.

### ✓ **Ask about prescriptions**

If your doctor prescribes something, ask for details: Why am I taking this? Are there side effects?