



# What to ask your doctor

## Plan ahead to ask the right questions

Have you ever found yourself drawing a blank when it comes time to ask your doctor important questions about your health? You're not alone. Taking time before your appointment to jot down some notes can help you get the most from your visit with your doctor..

### Before your visit

Your doctor needs to know all of the medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements and other treatments you use. Even herbal remedies and vitamin supplements can interact with food, alcohol or medication. They can also cause problems during medical procedures, if your doctor doesn't know you're taking them.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Make a list of the products you use, including:

- Prescription medications, including lotion, cream or ointment you put on your skin
- Over-the-counter medications and other drugs
- Vitamins
- Nutrition drinks or shakes
- Herbal remedies, including herbal tea
- Energy drinks

Also, make a note of how many cups of coffee you have each day, and how much alcohol you usually drink. Next, think through anything else you might want to tell your doctor. Finally, write down any questions you have. This list will get you started:

- What should I do to prevent or delay health problems?
- Are there changes I should make to improve my health?
- Are there tests or screenings I should have, based on my age or other risk factors?
- Am I due for any vaccines?
- Is this visit preventive or diagnostic?
- Do I need to come back for another visit?
- Can I call for test results?

### Need a doctor?

If you need to find a doctor, go to **healthlink.com**



#### Sources

1 U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Avoiding Drug Interactions (accessed October 2016): [www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm096386](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm096386)

2 The Clinical Advisor, Energy drinks may cause caffeine overdose, drug interactions (accessed January 2015): [clinicaladvisor.com](http://clinicaladvisor.com)

3 AgingCare, Think Twice About Giving Elders Nutritional Drinks or Shakes (accessed January 2015): [agingcare.com](http://agingcare.com)

4 National Institute of Health, Senior Health, Talking with Your Doctor (accessed October 2016): [nihseniorhealth.gov/talkingwithyourdoctor/askingquestions/01.html](http://nihseniorhealth.gov/talkingwithyourdoctor/askingquestions/01.html)

5 National Patient Safety Foundation, Ask Me 3™ (accessed January 2015): [npsf.org](http://npsf.org)

## What are preventive care and diagnostic care?

Did you know there are tests that can help you stay healthy, catch any problems early on and even save your life? They're called preventive care because they can help prevent some health problems. They're different from diagnostic care, which is when you have symptoms of a health problem and the doctor wants to find out why.

## What to ask if you're diagnosed with a health problem

If your doctor finds you have a health problem, you want to understand, in simple language, what the problem is. Because health issues can come up at any time, prepare yourself by bringing the following list of questions:<sup>4</sup>

- What's the name of the condition? How do you spell it?
- What does it mean?
- Why do you think I have this problem?  
What may have caused it?
- How long will it last?
- How will this problem affect me?  
Will I need to change my activities?
- Are there long-term effects?
- Can it be cured? How can it be treated, managed or made better?
- How can I learn more about it?

## What to know before you leave

By the end of your visit, you want to be able to answer these three questions:<sup>5</sup>

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

If you don't have the answers to these questions, ask your doctor again.



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