

# Maintaining Mental Health: Talking to Your Doctor

Good health care rests in good patient – doctor relationships. Communication is key. In the past, the doctor usually took the lead in directing a patient’s care. These days, doctors and patients form a partnership to solve health problems and develop strategies to keep patients healthy.

When you are older, you don’t want to let too many things go unchecked as your body’s systems are more vulnerable to the negative effects of compounded problems. If you feel different, notice physical symptoms that are not normal or experience trouble in new areas, it’s probably time to get things checked out.

A “geriatrician” is a doctor that specializes in the health of an older person. If you are considering changing doctors or health care providers, it is suggested that you look for a health care provider trained in geriatrics.

### *Please tell your doctor:*

**Your medical history:** illnesses, past operations, medical conditions that run in your family, conditions for which you are being treated and the contact information for the person(s) treating those conditions.

**Information about all your medications:** include all medications, even over-the-counter medications (eye drops, laxatives, cold medication, antacids, etc) and vitamins and dietary supplements. Know the dosage strengths, frequency and time of day medications are taken, successes and failures with past medications, any drug allergies and contact information for your pharmacy.

**Lifestyle and habits:** it is very important to be honest with your doctor about your lifestyle and life habits like what you eat, when you sleep, activities you enjoy, if you smoke or drink, sexual issues, personal stressors and feelings about personal health care practices. Then your doctor can make treatment choices that fit with your preferences.

**Health concerns and symptoms:** your description of concerns and symptoms is critical in helping the doctor identify potential problems, assessment options and treatment recommendations. Doctors want to know when symptoms started, when and how often they occur, how they impact your daily living and any details. Write down information about the problem so you can take it to your appointment.

## What You Need to Know...



Doctors may suggest tests to determine the source of a problem. It's important to be comfortable with the reasons for and procedures involved with the tests. Do not worry about bothering your doctor with questions – doctors should appreciate your interest. They should want you to feel comfortable and informed. When the source of a problem has been determined, the doctor might want to follow up with treatment which might include medication, surgery, changing habits (i.e. diet or activity level) or routines (i.e. when you eat or sleep) or suggest a particular therapy. Again, it is important to ask all the questions you have to make sure that you understand and are comfortable with decisions.

If you are not comfortable with the doctor's recommendations, ask about alternatives. Share any concerns you have about cost. Know that you are entitled to second and third opinions. If you are referred to a specialist, ask that the offices share your medical records, test results, treatment recommendations and medication information. Ask for written materials about your medical conditions and medications.

### **Here are some tips to make sure you have the information you need:**

- write down all your concerns, symptoms and questions before you go to the doctor and bring the list with you to the appointment
- ask a trusted friend to come along to take notes
- bring a tape recorder and ask to tape the conversations
- ask the doctor to write down all the conditions and recommendations
- keep a file for each doctor you see and each condition you have and make sure to bring these files and a list of your medications when you go to any health care appointment (keep a separate file for old conditions, medications or doctors so you have a documented history)

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at (414) 276-3122 or visit us on the web at [www.mhawisconsin.org](http://www.mhawisconsin.org).

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