



Becoming Your Own Health Advocate

You have an important role to play in your medical care. Research shows that patients who are active participants in their healthcare have greater medical literacy, better treatment adherence and better health outcomes. The following list will help you change from a passive patient to an active advocate.

- 1 DON'T BE AFRAID TO SPEAK UP.** Although your doctor should use language that's easy for you to understand, that's not always the case. The onus is on you to ask for clarification if you don't understand something.
- 2 BE PREPARED.** You don't always get a lot of time with your physician so use that time wisely. Jot down a list of topics you want to discuss with your doctor. It will help guide your visit.
- 3 REVIEW MEDICAL BILLS FOR ERRORS.** An estimated 8 in 10 hospital bills contain overcharges. Common mistakes include duplicate charges, wrong quantities of medications or items and being charged for canceled tests or procedures.
- 4 HAVE BACKUP.** Bring another person with you to important appointments. Having another person there to listen will help you make sure you don't miss any critical information.
- 5 GET A SECOND OPINION.** If you feel uncomfortable with a diagnosis, double-check results with another doctor. Some estimates say one in 20 Americans is the victim of outpatient diagnostic errors.
- 6 UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE WORKS.** A recent study found many Americans don't understand the basics of their coverage. Knowing how your insurance works helps you navigate the health care system with less chance of ending up with costly, unexpected medical bills.
- 7 KNOW YOUR BODY.** Pay attention to the way you feel. If something has changed, talk to your doctor.
- 8 KNOW YOUR MEDS.** Be clear about the purpose of any medication you take. Also, bring a list of all the medications you take (including dosages) to every doctor visit. This cuts the potential for unnecessary duplications or harmful drug interactions.
- 9 KEEP YOUR APPOINTMENTS.** Schedule your physical, colonoscopy, eye exam or anything else you are due to undergo. Regular healthcare appointments can ensure good health and catch potential problems early on.
- 10 UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU'RE GETTING YOUR INFORMATION FROM.** Not all information on the web is trustworthy, especially when it comes to medical topics. Take all information gleaned online (and from well-meaning friends) with a grain of salt until you've checked it with a credible source.
- 11 CHANGE PRACTICES IF YOU ARE UNHAPPY.** Healthcare is a service and you should be happy with the service you receive. Change practices if you are uncomfortable with the personalities and attitudes of a particular office. There are plenty of other doctors who want your business.

Sources: WebMD | U.S. News & World Report | Georgia State University | The Huffington Post