



Working With Your Healthcare Provider

How to Help Your Healthcare Provider Help You

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International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (www.iffgd.org)

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A partnership between a patient and healthcare provider is essential when managing all chronic illnesses. Because the time spent with your healthcare provider is both limited and valuable, you can maximize it by following some simple guidelines before and after the visit.

When Scheduling Your Visit

When calling to schedule your appointment, be sure to ask about the following.

1. Access to Prior Medical Records

Does your healthcare provider have access to your prior medical records and test results? If not, what is the best way to forward your records in advance?

Sending your medical records in advance will allow your healthcare provider to review them before seeing you.

Which records should I bring?

- When possible, bring a paper copy of your prior medical records to your visit.
- If you have multiple records to share, organize them by date, type, and/or relevance to your upcoming visit.
- Your prior medical records may include imaging studies. You can call the radiology department of the facility where the tests were done and request that they create a disk of your films.

What if I cannot access my prior medical records?

If you are not able to request or obtain your past medical records, do not worry. Your healthcare provider office staff can request them for you once you have been seen. You will need to sign a medical information release form, and records will not be available for your initial visit.

2. Are there any new patient forms that should be completed in advance?

Completing forms in advance (often available online or for download) will allow you to provide complete and thoughtful responses as opposed to completing the forms in the waiting room where there may be limited time.

Other questions (if applicable)

3. What are the parking options for this office?

Prior knowledge about travel routes or parking arrangements may reduce stress at the time of your visit and will help to ensure you have given yourself enough time for traffic and parking considerations. Consider asking if you will need to pay to park. If so, ask the office if they will give you a voucher for this charge.

4. Interpreter Services / Other Accommodations:

- Are there interpretation services available if needed?
- Are there other accommodations needed to ensure patient accessibility?

5. Cancellation List:

Does the office have a cancellation list or other means to book an earlier appointment if one becomes available?

Some offices keep a “cancellation list”—a list of patients interested in being seen sooner than their current appointment. If there is a cancellation and an earlier appointment becomes available, the office can offer the appointment to a patient on the cancellation list.

Before Your Visit

1. What to Bring to Your Appointment?

You may need to bring items to help you fill out the intake forms and to get setup in their system. These may include:

- Your insurance card
- Your drivers license or other ID
- A record of all family medical histories

2. What Information to Prepare

You will need to gather information to help you make the most out of your visit with your healthcare provider. These include:

Current Medications

A List of ALL medications you are currently taking including:

- Prescriptions
- Over the counter
- Supplements
- Herbal preparations

Be sure to include the dose you are taking the frequency and timing of when you are taking them. (*Example: Omeprazole 20 mg / once a day 30-60 minutes prior to breakfast.*)

Consider bringing the medication bottles with you, in addition to the medication list, in case of any questions. Your pharmacy can print a list of your prescription medications—check to ensure that the list is current. If you have already tried multiple medications for your symptoms, make a list including dose, duration of use and response. (*Example: Omeprazole 20 mg in a.m. for two months—reduced heartburn but not abdominal pain.*)

1. Pharmacy Information

Your healthcare provider may ask what pharmacy you prefer to use. Remember to include the following information:

- Pharmacy Name
- Pharmacy Address
- Pharmacy Phone and Fax number

2. Allergies

Before going to your appointment, be sure to create a list of all allergies to medications or other allergies and the type of reaction. *Example: Penicillin gives me a skin rash.*

3. Brief Medical History

If you have never been seen at this office or another doctor in this health care system, the following information may be helpful:

- Prior medical history, including list of illnesses / surgeries you had in the past.
- Family history, medical problems in the family, including mother/father/siblings/grandparents.
- Social history, use of alcohol/tobacco/marijuana and living situation.
- The names of your primary care healthcare provider, referring practitioner, and other specialists you are seeing.

4. What Triggers Your Symptoms

Summarize observations regarding your symptoms in 1–2 sentences: what triggers them, what makes them worse or makes them better?

- Keeping a symptom diary to identify symptom patterns may be helpful. Consider diet, external influences or stressors that might have contributed to your symptoms when they are particularly bad. *Example: I have noticed that certain foods such as milk or fatty foods and stress will bring on my symptoms.*
- Analyze patterns prior to visit so that you can summarize them for your healthcare provider.

Download IFFGD Fact Sheet 421
Personal Daily Diary (All GI Disorders)
To assist you in tracking your symptoms

5. Priorities for the Visit

Before your visit, it is helpful to think about how your healthcare provider can help you the most? Writing a summary of your top priorities in 1–2 sentences and sharing them with your healthcare provider early in the visit will help you get the most out of the visit. *Example: The main reason for my visit is ... I hope we can focus on ... I am mostly worried about ... I have three main concerns I would like to discuss with you today.*

It may be helpful to share other information with your healthcare provider as well, such as:

- What bothers you or affects your life the most? Give an example of what you are not able to do because of your symptoms (*Example: missing work/intimacy issues*).
- What are you worried about? (*Example: cancer*)
- What do you think may be causing your symptoms? (*Example: wondering if you may have a GI infection*)

6. Questions You Would Like to Ask

Identify the top 1–3 questions you would like to ask during the visit. Keep in mind other questions can be addressed during subsequent visits. *Example: What do you think is going on? Is there an alternative to a test or medication? Side effects of medications? What is the long-term prognosis of this condition?*

7. Support to Consider

It is often helpful to ask a friend or relative to come to the visit with you for added support.

- A friend or relative can assist in taking notes so you can fully attend the appointment.

- You can always ask your friend or relative to step out for part of the visit if you would like (for example, during the physical exam).
- If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, go to the emergency room or call 911 to get immediate care.

At Your Visit

Here are some tips to make the most of your visit:

- Arrive early.
- Expect delays (bring a book or something else to occupy you).
- Be sure you can see and hear as well as possible.
- Share your priorities for the visit early in the appointment.
- Be as open as possible about your concerns and/or fears.
- Avoid naming the condition (“I have gastritis”) and instead focus on symptoms (“I have pain in my stomach”).
- Avoid bringing up a new problem at the end of the visit. Stay focused on the concern you made the appointment for and schedule a new appointment for any additional concerns.
- Ask for a description of the tests being ordered or performed.
- Ask what you can expect regarding notification of test results—labs, x-rays if relevant.
- Consider discussing expectations about the treatment
- If you have a specific follow-up time interval in mind, let your healthcare provider know your expectations.
- Take notes to keep a record of major points discussed at your appointment.
- Before leaving your visit with your healthcare provider, consider discussing how communication will happen following the visit. They may suggest using a patient portal online or that you call the nurse at the office.

After Your Visit / Between Visits

Using a patient portal

Many health care systems offer a patient portal or online messaging system. This is a platform that can be used by computer or on a smart phone that allows patients to send and receive secure messages from their healthcare providers.

- Please note the message system is not a substitute for a follow-up visit.
- Do not use the patient portal if you have an urgent or emergent concern; instead, contact your healthcare provider office directly.
- Keep in mind healthcare providers receive multiple messages per day and may not be able to respond the same day.
- Clearly state your purpose and keep messages brief.

Appropriate Use of Online Messaging System*

The online messaging system or patient portal is best used when asking questions or requesting updates regarding:

- Medications prescribed by the healthcare provider.
- Test results ordered by the healthcare provider.
- Providing information that your healthcare provider has asked you to send via the patient portal.

Inappropriate Use of Online Messaging System*

The online messaging system or patient portal should not be used when asking questions or requesting updates regarding:

- New, severe or worsening symptoms that may require an emergency room visit or same-day office visit.
- “Next steps,” multiple questions or long updates—these are best addressed during a follow-up visit.
- What is the diagnosis—this is best addressed during a follow-up visit.

*Note these are generalizations; your healthcare provider may have more specific criteria regarding use of this system.

About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: www.iffgd.org.

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