



# Communicating with Your Doctor

A relationship with your doctor is very personal partnership built on communication and trust. When you chose a doctor, the “chemistry” between the two of you must work. You must be able to trust, confide in and tell your doctor about your health problems (which include all symptoms). Your doctor, in turn, should listen to you, give you options and feedback, and have your best interest in mind. Here are some things you can do to help build a successful partnership.

## Be Organized

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Doctors are busy people, so you need to know how to get the most from their limited time with you. This means that you need to be organized and focus on the main issues you want to address.

- Provide your doctor with accurate information about your symptoms and medications
- Provide the names of the other doctors you are seeing.
- Keep a list of:
  - the medications and supplements you are taking
  - all recent symptoms and the dates at which they occurred
  - any recent tests

## Set the Tone

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Let your doctor know:

- How much you would like to be involved in the decision making process and whether you want the details or just general information.
- Your cultural beliefs that may affect your treatment choices or preferences.

## Ask Questions

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Before the appointment:

- Decide which questions are most important to you.
- Start your discussion by stating your personal goal for this appointment (i.e., the main question or concern you want addressed).
- Send your list of questions to the doctor in advance.
- Make a copy of your questions to hand to your doctor at the beginning of the appointment.

The **Next Steps** program can help you to identify your key questions and concerns about your treatment, and organize them so that you can effectively discuss them with your doctor. Next Steps is provided as a free service. Call the Cancer Resource Center at (415) 885-3693 for more information.

## Take Notes or Make a Recording

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It is common during the first few office visits to be overwhelmed and to forget much of what is said. You might consider:

- Bringing a family member or good friend to your first few visits.
  - Having another person there to ask questions and to review the information with you afterwards can be very helpful.
- Tape recording your visit so you can listen to it later
  - Many smart phones offer the option to make recordings. Tape recorders are available for loan at the Cancer Resource Center.
  - California law requires all parties to know they are being recorded, so be sure and tell your doctor you would like to make a recording so you can better remember what he or she tells you.
- You can also ask your doctor to send you a copy of his or her evaluation and treatment options.

## Be Your Own Advocate

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There is nothing more important than your health. Do not be afraid to ask your doctor questions. If your concerns are not being addressed, you may need to be assertive. Let your doctor know if you still have questions and ask if:

- You can set up another appointment
- Whether the current appointment can be extended
- If there are other staff members who can address your questions.

## Be Understanding

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It is important to balance assertiveness with respect and understanding. Although it is important to let your doctor know your needs or when you're unhappy with your communication, it is equally important to let them know when you are happy with your communication and treatment. Also, be respectful of time and keep in mind that many of your questions can be addressed by a nurse, a social worker or by the staff at the Cancer Resource Center.

## Who Else is Involved

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Many oncologists work closely with other team members. Be sure to ask if there is anyone else you should meet with. Let your doctor know if you are seeing other doctors or health care providers at UCSF or other institutions.

## Know How to Keep in Touch

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Before you leave, find out what is the best way to keep in touch between office visits, whether through the nurse, via email or by leaving messages at the front desk.

## Additional Resources

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For additional information or resources, please visit the Cancer Resource Center at 1600 Divisadero Street on the first floor, or call at (415) 885-3693. If you need help prioritizing your questions you might ask about the Next Steps program. The information in this publication is designed for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or health care provider. We encourage you to discuss with your provider any questions and concerns that you may have.

## Notes

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