

# Tips for talking to your healthcare team

## Working with your healthcare team

Here are a few tips to keep in mind before, during, and after you visit your healthcare team, including doctors, nurses, dentists, psychologists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, dieticians, and more.

### Before Your Visit:

- Write down how you feel, questions, symptoms, and concerns

When it's time to speak with your healthcare team\*, do you forget what you wanted to ask? Most of us do. Writing down a list of questions, symptoms, and concerns ahead of time can help. When you're done, mark the most important things. Use the **Symptom Tracker** and **Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Team** as guides (see links on page 3).

- Ask a family member or friend to go with you

Asking someone you trust to go with you to your appointment can be useful. Your companion can help you with questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations. You may also identify someone as your **Designated Support Person / Essential Care Partner**—they will play a more active role on your healthcare team (see links on page 3).

Note: During the COVID-19 pandemic, a companion **may not always be permitted**. Be sure to ask about the current restrictions before your appointment.

If you go alone, you may want to bring a notepad and pen to take notes, or record the session. Most smartphones have a built-in

audio recorder, or you can download an app, such as Alberta Health Services' **My Care Conversations Recording App** (see link on page 3). Your healthcare team will likely agree to be recorded, but be sure to ask first.

- List all your medications and dosage

Take along a current list of the prescription and non-prescription medications you use, including things such as vitamins and herbal remedies. Create a **medication list** to get started (see link on page 3). Your healthcare team needs to know everything you're taking. Having a list makes it easy for you to remember and for your team to review.



### During Your Visit:

- Start the conversation

Use your list of questions, symptoms, and concerns to tell your healthcare team what you want to discuss and what you want to get from the appointment. Explain what concerns you most. If your list is long, you may need to plan together how best to handle things – you might need another appointment to cover everything or to follow up.

**Tip:** If you have any concerns, call ahead to inform the clinic that you may need some extra time or ask if you need additional appointments.

---

- **Discuss what different treatment options could be**

Make sure you understand the advantages and disadvantages of treatment options. It's important to understand the full impact of the suggested treatment and any side effects that you might experience. Take the time you need to understand your options. Use the **Questions to Ask about Your Treatment Options** as a guide (see link on page 3).

---

- **Ask for more information or resources about your concerns, medications, or any treatment options**

Ask questions like: "Are there other resources available where I can learn more?" By asking your healthcare team for more information, you get accurate and reliable information to learn more about your concerns at your own pace. If they don't have resources handy, they should be able to tell you where to find them.

---

- **Write down or record instructions and information you're given before you leave**

Studies show that even when we feel we understand our healthcare teams' instructions during our visit, there's a good chance it may not all make sense by the time we get home.

Write down instructions and information immediately — or record it (with your team's permission) so you can go over it later. You may find Alberta Health Services' **My Care Conversations Recording App** useful for recording conversations (see link on page 3).

---

- **Repeat back the instructions given to you and practise any steps in front of your healthcare team**

This ensures the whole team, you included, understands what needs to be done. A simple sentence like: "Let me see if I understand you correctly...." can help you process the information with your healthcare team and help your team clarify any information.

**Examples include:**

- a. Having your doctor listen while you explain in your own words what you need to do and why
  - b. Showing the home care nurse how you will operate equipment (e.g., oxygen tank)
  - c. Repeating back to your pharmacist the instructions for taking your medicine
- 

- **Confirm who from the team should be your main contact and when and how you can expect to hear from them**

Find out how your healthcare team handles test results and how long they typically take. Also ask them about special appointments. Some doctors only call or schedule an appointment if further follow-up is needed. It's important to know what to expect so you can follow up.

## After Your Visit:

- **Follow up with appointments**

If you need tests, make appointments at the lab or other offices as soon as possible. Confirm how long the results may take to get to your healthcare team.

---

- **Call back if you have any concerns**

It's normal and common to feel confused or misunderstood. Don't hesitate to call your healthcare team whenever:

- a. You have questions.
- b. Your symptoms get worse.
- c. You have problems with your medicine.
- d. You are waiting on test results or to schedule an appointment, and you haven't heard back in the time agreed upon. You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication.

If you cannot reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link 24/7 by dialing 8-1-1.

\*Healthcare team refers to patients, their caregivers, and healthcare providers that come together to plan and coordinate a person's care.

- **Websites used in this document:**

- **Symptom Tracker**  
<https://hqca.ca/symptom-tracker>
- **Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Team**  
<https://hqca.ca/questions-to-ask-your-healthcare-team>
- **Designated Support Persons**  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17001.aspx>
- **Essential Care Partner**  
<https://www.healthcareexcellence.ca/en/what-we-do/what-we-do-together/essential-together/who-knows-essential-care-partners-do-landing/resources-for-patients-and-essential-care-partners/>
- **My Care Conversations Recording App**  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page16144.aspx>
- **Medication List**  
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/medicine-tracking-tools.aspx>
- **Questions to Ask About Your Treatment Options**  
<https://hqca.ca/questions-to-ask-about-your-treatment-options>