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Communicate to get the most out of medical care

Ideally, the patient-doctor relationship is a partnership in which you and your primary care physician work together to maintain your health. Making this partnership work and getting the most out of your medical care depends on good communication. When you take an active part in decisions about your health care, you and your doctor share the responsibility for good communication. As in any relationship, good communication doesn't just happen - it takes time and effort.

It helps if you bring a written list of your symptoms and questions to the appointment and a pad and pencil to write down the answers. If you are taking medications (either prescription or over-the-counter) or are undergoing treatment, write down the details beforehand. Include in your list of medications any "natural" or homeopathic remedies you may be taking.

When talking with your doctor, it's best to address your medical concerns up front in as much detail as possible. For example, rather than saying "My stomach hurts a lot," try to be as specific as possible: "For the past three weeks, I've been getting a sharp pain on my right side for about an hour after I eat."

Similarly, if you think you know what's wrong with you or you have a specific concern, say so: "I've been having trouble climbing stairs and I'm afraid I might have asthma." The doctor will appreciate knowing this, since it will give him or her a chance to immediately address your greatest fears.

Finally, if your questions have been asked and answered and you still aren't satisfied, you may need to look for a doctor with a communication style that matches your own. It's important to choose a doctor that creates an atmosphere that makes you feel open and comfortable. Then once you find that doctor, stay with him or her. That's how you build a trusting relationship.

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This is the eighth article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university.

SUMMARY

Ideally, the patient-doctor relationship is a partnership in which you and your primary care physician work together to maintain your health. Making this partnership work and getting the most out of your medical care depends on good communication. When you take an active part in decisions about your health care, you and your doctor share the responsibility for good communication. As in any relationship, good communication doesn't just happen - it takes time and effort.

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