

Let's talk about you



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A trip to the hospital or getting a difficult diagnosis can stir up a range of emotions from fear and confusion to despair. Making matters worse, you may immediately have to make decisions about lab tests, treatments, referrals, etc. It's during anxious times like these that it's easy to become a passive participant in your medical care. It's natural to feel overwhelmed and frightened when your health seems out of your control. But taking charge is what you need to do to ensure that you get the best care possible.

Steps you can take

Taking an active role means staying involved. You can do this by:

- Asking questions and making sure that you understand your condition, all of your treatment options, and the benefits and risks of each one.
- Keeping your health care providers informed of any changes in your condition, good or bad, such as an allergic reaction to a drug.
- Speaking up when you have a question about any part of your care.
- Informing all of your health care providers about the medicines (over-the-counter and prescriptions), vitamins and supplements that you take, to make sure it's safe to take them all at the same time. Doctors do not always coordinate and depend on you to keep them informed.

Working with your doctor

Do not be afraid to ask your doctor questions. Remember, your doctors are working for you. Communicating with them will likely improve your treatment results.

- **Prescriptions**—Make sure you understand what any prescribed drugs are for and all of the possible side effects.
- **Allergies**—Tell your doctor about any allergies or problems you have had with medicines.
- **Tests**—Follow up on tests. Ask your doctor when results are expected and call to get them if the doctor does not call you. Ask your doctor to explain any results that you don't understand.
- **Questions**—Write down questions for your doctor before your visit. Feel free to take notes or bring a friend or family member to take notes during your appointment.

The bottom line: Speak up! Don't be afraid to ask questions if you have doubts or concerns. You and your health care providers are a team, so get actively involved at every step of your treatment.

Know your numbers

Blood Pressure: This is a report card on your heart's performance and an indicator of the condition of your arteries. Your blood pressure consists of two numbers: systolic (first/top set of numbers) and diastolic (the second/bottom set of numbers). A normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 ("120 over 80"). In general, the lower your blood pressure, the better; however, if a low reading occurs, and you are not feeling well, you should speak to your doctor.

Fasting Lipoprotein Profile: Cholesterol plays a huge part in an individual's heart health. Knowing these levels/numbers is very important because a high number can produce a greater risk of heart disease, heart attack or stroke. As a result, the Plan covers one routine fasting lipoprotein profile (total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides) every five years, for ages 20 and older. Your cost: Nothing when you use a PPO provider.

Diabetes Screening: You need to know how much glucose—an important and necessary source of energy—is in your blood. This number is important for detection of diabetes and other treatable medical conditions. The Plan covers a routine diabetes screening to include: Two fasting blood sugar tests every three years. Your cost: Nothing when you use a PPO provider.

Body Mass Index: Body mass index (BMI) is a number based on a person's weight and height that provides a way to estimate the effect of weight on health. A normal BMI is 18.5 to 24.9. The higher the BMI, the greater the risk of some diseases, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, stroke, osteoarthritis, some cancers, and Type 2 diabetes. To calculate exact BMI, the following equation can be used. The person's weight in pounds and height in inches: $BMI = (\text{pounds} \times 703) \text{ divided by } (\text{inches squared})$.

Your health is in your hands

The last point that I would like to close with is creating a conscious hand-washing habit for your health. When you think about all the places you are throughout the day, and all of the items you have touched (hand rails, doorknobs, pens/pencils, shopping cart handles, etc.), it is easy to see how quickly germs spread.

Despite the belief that cold germs are spread through sneezing and coughing, the majority of germ transmission actually comes from hand-to-hand contact. Touching germs and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes can make you sick. This is why washing your hands is so important.