

# TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR HEALTHCARE

## HOW CAN I PREVENT PROBLEMS WITH MY MEDICATIONS?

Making sure that you and your physician are familiar with your medications is another important step in taking an active role in your healthcare.

- **Make sure that all of your physicians and pharmacists know about everything you are taking**, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs.
- **Tell your physician about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines.**
- **Make sure you can read all prescriptions written by your physician.**
- **Ask for information about your medicine in terms you can understand.** What is the medicine used for? How am I supposed to take it and for how long? What side effects are likely? What should I do if I have side effects? Is this medicine safe to take with the other medicines and dietary supplements that I am taking? Are there any foods, drinks or activities that should I avoid while taking this medicine?
- **When you pick up medication from the pharmacy, make sure it is the medicine your physician prescribed.**
- **Ask your physician or the pharmacist** if you have any questions about the directions on your medicine labels.
- **If you have problems with your medication, call your physician.**

## WHAT IF I HAVE TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL?

If you need to be admitted to a hospital, there are several steps you can take several steps to ensure your safety

- **Make sure you know who is in charge of your care.**
- **If you have a choice, go to a hospital where many patients have had the procedure or surgery you need.**
- **If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your physician, and your surgeon agree and are clear on exactly what will be done.**
- **Ask a family member or friend to be there with you and to be your advocate.** Even if you don't need help now, you might need someone to speak up for you if you can't because of illness or surgery.

Sources: "Patient Fact Sheet: 20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors," AHRQ publication No. 00-PO38, February 2000; "Quick Tips – When Talking with Your Doctor," AHRQ publication No. 01-0040a, May 2002; and "Patient Fact Sheet: Five Steps to Safer Health Care," AHRQ publication No. 03-M007, July 2003. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. For complete text, go to [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.htm), [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.htm) and [www.ahrq.gov/consumer/5steps.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/5steps.htm).



California Medical Association  
*Physicians dedicated to the health of Californians*

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*A guide for patients and their families  
on how to prepare for a physician or  
hospital visit*

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*Taking an active role in your healthcare will help your physician evaluate your health, reduce the chance of medical errors, and improve your confidence in the safety of your medical treatment.*

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR MY OFFICE VISIT?

In order to get maximum benefit from your visit to your doctor, it is important that you plan ahead. Here are some pre-appointment steps to take that will help you get the most out of your visit.

- **Make a list of all the medications you are currently taking. Include when and how often you take them, the condition for which you are taking them and the strength of the medication.** This list should include prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs. The list should also **record any drug allergies you have.**
- **Write down your your health history – including surgeries, major illnesses, or conditions – and keep it up to date.**
- **Make a list of where you received other medical treatment, tests, or x-rays.**
- **Write down the questions that you'd like to ask the doctor.**
- **Discuss your most important problems and know why you need the appointment.**

- **Complete an Advance Healthcare Directive, or living will.** An advance directive will make sure that health care wishes are known if for any reason you are unable to speak for yourself. An advance directive also allows you to appoint a health care “agent” to make health care decisions in the event that you are incapacitated. For more information and to obtain a sample Advance Healthcare Directive, please go to [www.cmanet.org/publicdoc.cfm/7](http://www.cmanet.org/publicdoc.cfm/7)

## WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE AT MY APPOINTMENT?

Your office visit is a good chance for you to get your questions answered and to form a relationship with your physician. If you take an active role in your care, you are more likely to be satisfied with your care and get better results.

- **Ask questions if you don't understand.** Your physician wants you to understand your health care condition.
- **Avoid distractions during your appointment (such as cell phones or small children).**
- **Bring a family member or friend to your appointment if you feel it will help you understand and remember what happened during the visit.**
- **Make sure that your physician knows important things about your health history.** Don't hesitate to remind your physician about any medication allergies or medical conditions you have.
- **Give your physician your list of medications, health history, and other medical information you have brought with you.**

- **You might find it helpful to take notes if the medical issues are complicated. Feel free to ask for written instructions or to ask your physician to draw pictures if it might help explain something.**
- Your physician and his staff make every effort to avoid spreading germs. One way they do this by frequent handwashing. **If you have concerns feel free to discuss with your physician the methods he or she uses to minimize the spread of germs.**
- **Make sure you and your physician agree on a follow-up plan** before you leave your physician's office.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER I HAVE LEFT MY PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE?

Taking an active role in your care does not end when you leave the physician's office. You must take additional steps to make sure you remain satisfied with your care.

- **Call your physician if you have questions, your symptoms get worse, or you have problems with your medicine.**
- **If your physician said you need to get lab work or see a specialist, make those appointments as soon as possible.**
- **Do not assume that no news is good news.** Ask when and how you will get the results of any tests or procedures your physician has ordered. Call your physician and ask for the results. Ask what the results mean for your care.