

Ask Me Three™

Developed by Partnership for Clear Health Communication at the National Patient Safety Foundation.

Ask your doctor or nurse the following three questions. Write down the answers:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

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The Emotional Side of Healthcare: Six Tips for Talking to Your Doctor

It is important to know what to do before, during and after a doctor appointment. Talking to the doctor can be stressful. There often isn't much time, so you may feel rushed. You may be scared, confused, anxious, worried, tired and sick. How can you prepare yourself **emotionally** to talk to the doctor, whether the conversation takes place in an office, in the hospital, or over the telephone? Look inside for six empowerment tips:

<http://www.patientsafety.org/page/transtoolkit/>
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Six Tips ...

Tip #1 - When it comes to your body, you are the expert. Only you know how you feel before or after treatment. Tell your doctor about all of your symptoms, whether specific or vague, and when they occur. Every symptom provides a clue to help the doctor diagnose and treat your problems.

Tip #2 - Open up. If there is something worrying or upsetting you, this is important. No matter how busy you think the doctor is, you need to explain, slowly and calmly what is on your mind. Don't minimize or ignore your concerns. Remember, your doctor is there to help you, but he or she can help you only if you open up.

Tip #3 - Make sure your doctor takes your concerns seriously. If you sense that the doctor is minimizing your concerns, or "talking down" to you, tell the doctor politely but clearly your goal is to be a partner in your care. If you are calm this can open up a conversation about what this means to you, and how you can work together as partners.

Tip #4 - Trust your instincts, know your worth and speak up.

If you feel the doctor is:

- Rushing you
- Not giving you enough information
- Not asking enough questions
- Writing a prescription you cannot read
- Not explaining things clearly enough
- Being impolite, condescending or rude

Tell the doctor how you feel and politely ask him or her to do better. You can say: "You're going to fast for me" or "I need you to explain that again." Your doctor will try to do better and will respect you for having spoken up. If the doctor responds negatively, it may be time to find a new doctor.

Tip #5 - Remind yourself what you need to know, and why. This will help keep you focused and in control of the conversation, especially important if the conversation gets sidetracked or if you are feeling rushed.

Tip #6 - Don't be afraid to ask "Is there anything else this could be?"¹

Sometimes a simple question such as this will help the doctor think more broadly to reach the correct diagnosis. Get your worries and questions out into the open. Remember: doctors do not know everything and often need and welcome our help.

¹Groopman J. *How Doctors Think*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007.