

Navigating the Health Care System

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Name:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide was created by Denise Hughes, MS, and Zaynah Henry, BS.

Thanks to Nemours' team members Robin Brennan, DrPH; Rendell Bradley, MS; Erin Carroll, LPCMH; Gina Celano, MS; Anne Correa, MS; Kristin Maiden, PhD; Marianne Olmstead; Kaya Simonson; Erika Stroh; Kelli Thompson, JD; and Meghan Walls, PsyD; for their input and review.

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Module 1: Introduction

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Introduction

What is the Adolescent Health Literacy Program?

This program was designed to help you take charge of your own health care. There are a lot of changes happening in your life and this program will also help you to learn more about your personal and family health and how to make your way through the health care system. This is a great opportunity to learn more about yourself and your family, and how it could improve your life.

First, take a minute to describe what you think health is:

What will I learn?

You will learn to manage your health care by learning about doctors, insurance, family history, going to the doctor and much more. By the end of these lessons, you will have the knowledge and skills necessary to take care of your own health needs and you will be able to navigate the health care system.

What is in this workbook?

This workbook contains information that will help you take care of yourself. There are worksheets, activities and scenarios that will make health care seem easier to understand. Information about insurance, how to schedule doctor appointments, how to visit with a doctor independently and much more are covered in this workbook. Use this workbook as a guide to help you understand all of the information covered in the adolescent health literacy program. Note pages have been included at the end of each section for you to take notes and/or write down any questions you may have.

Definition of Health

What does health mean?

According to the World Health Organization, health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹ In other words, you are healthy when both your mind and body are in good condition. Health is extremely important because it can define the quality of your life. Taking the steps to achieve health can help you live a long and happy life.

What is health care?

Health care is a network of services offered by professionals who help prevent, treat and manage illness, as well as preserve mental and physical well-being. Health care includes services from primary care doctors to specialists who work in specific fields such as dentists, psychologists and others. The health care system is what you use to achieve good health.²

What is health literacy?^{3,4}

Health Literacy is knowing how to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make good health decisions. It includes being able to read pamphlets, make doctor appointments, and use decision-making skills to take charge of your own health care needs.

Why is health literacy important?

As you start to become more independent, being able to understand health information will help to inform your choices and behaviors which will affect your future health. It will also help you to talk with your doctor and feel confident in taking charge of your health care.

Self Advocacy

What is self advocacy?⁵

Self advocacy is your ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert your own interests, desires, needs and rights. By doing this, you should be able to make informed decisions based on what is best for you as an individual and have more control over your own life.⁶

A good self advocate is able to let people know what they think, feel and need. It sometimes means asking questions until you really understand the answers. It could mean asking for help or helping others understand what is important to you. You might not always get what you want, the way you want it, but having the skills to communicate your wants and needs is an important step.

Self Advocate Qualities

Please place a star (★) in the box for the qualities you think you have and a check (✓) for those you want to work on.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I ask questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	I actively listen
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am prepared and organized	<input type="checkbox"/>	I take action, one step at a time, to make sure I get what is best for me
<input type="checkbox"/>	I say what I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	I communicate clearly and with confidence
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am assertive, but respectful and polite	<input type="checkbox"/>	I speak up for myself
<input type="checkbox"/>	I communicate my strengths, needs and wishes	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am able to listen to the opinions of others, even when their opinions differ from mine
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have self-respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	I take responsibility for myself
<input type="checkbox"/>	I know my rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	I know where to get help or who to go to with a question

Tips for self advocacy:⁷

- Know and understand your rights and responsibilities.
- Learn all you can about your needs, strengths and weaknesses.
- Know what accommodations you may need as well as why you need them.
- Know how to effectively and assertively communicate your needs and preferences.
- Find out who key people are and how to contact them if necessary.
- Be willing to ask questions when something is unclear or you need clarification.

Primary Care Physician (PCP)

What is a primary care physician?⁸

A primary care physician (PCP) is the general doctor who provides you with routine care, simply known as your doctor. They can help you prevent illnesses, treat a variety of problems, and recommend you to specialists if necessary. Essentially, a doctor is the starting point of the health care system. There are three types of doctors who qualify as a PCP:

- Family or general practitioners – these doctors treat the entire family
- Internists – these doctors study internal medicine and can often specialize in certain organs or even certain age groups (e.g., elderly)
- Pediatricians – these doctors specialize in child health and usually treat patients from birth to 18
 - » It is important to know at what age your pediatrician will stop seeing you and you will have to find a new doctor.

Why should you have a doctor?⁸

Having a doctor is important because it allows you to build a trusting relationship in the health care system. Also, many insurance companies require you to have one. Over time, your doctor gets to know you very well, especially if you see them on a regular basis. Once they get to know you, they will be able to notice changes in your body such as diseases or illnesses that you might not have realized otherwise. Your doctor can also educate you on healthy lifestyle behaviors that could significantly reduce your risk for future health problems.

PCP contact information

If you have a doctor, it is important to know their contact information.

- Doctor's name
- Doctor's phone number
- Doctor's address
- Office hours

A good place to keep this information is in your cell phone contacts.

Finding the Right Doctor

If you are going to build a strong relationship with your doctor, it is important that you find the right one for you. You want someone you feel comfortable talking to and you want someone you can trust to take care of you in the best way. So how do you go about finding the right one?

How do I find the right doctor for me?

To find the right doctor, you might have to do some research. You can ask your friends and family members for the names of their doctors. If they are comfortable with their doctor, chances are you will be, too. Be sure to check if they take your insurance. Sometimes you can even ask your local hospital if they can suggest a doctor who meets your needs. Once you have some names, you should set up an appointment to meet with and talk to the doctor.

Below is a chart of questions to think about when choosing a doctor. If the answers match what you are looking for, then you've found your doctor.

Questions to Consider⁹

Does your health insurance cover that particular doctor's services?	Yes	No
Is the office staff friendly and helpful?	Yes	No
Are the office hours convenient to your schedule?	Yes	No
How easy is it to reach the doctor? Do they use email?	Easy	Not Easy
Do you prefer a doctor whose communication style is warm and friendly or formal?	Warm and Friendly	Formal
Does the provider allow you to be involved in your care?	Yes	No

Specialist

A specialist is a doctor who has special knowledge and skills relating to a particular area of medicine. These doctors have advanced training and education in their speciality.¹⁰ For example, if you have a pain in your foot that will not go away you should do the following to determine the best care needed:

Go to your PCP to discuss the pain. They will determine if you need to see a specialist. Make sure your insurance will cover the specialist's services and treatments.

When to Go to the Emergency Department/Urgent Care vs. PCP

It is important to seek the right kind of help for each medical situation. Some medical problems are more urgent than others and require immediate attention, while some problems can be taken care of during a scheduled doctor's visit. You must know when it is time to see your PCP, go to the Emergency Department, or use other medical centers.⁵

When to go to the Emergency Department (ED)⁵

You should go to the ED for serious or life-threatening problems. The ED is open 24 hours a day every day of the year. EDs are not good for regular health care because the doctors will not be able to provide follow-up care. They will not keep track of your medical conditions or note any changes that may occur over time. The ED is usually very busy and can be expensive. If you do not have an emergency you should call your doctor to find out what to do. Some common emergencies may include:

- chest pain
- vomiting blood or uncontrollable bleeding
- seizures
- very high fever
- difficulty breathing
- sudden dizziness or loss of balance
- severe burns

Urgent Care Clinics¹¹

When your doctor is not available, you may seek medical attention at an urgent care clinic (Medical Aid Unit, MedExpress, Got A Doc, etc.). Most clinics are open every day including holidays. Some clinics are even open 24 hours a day. You do not need an appointment but should check what hours they are open before going to the clinic. Urgent care clinics provide treatment for many conditions including:

- cuts and lacerations
- sprains and strains
- colds and flu-like symptoms
- work-related injuries
- eye and ear problems
- minor burns
- sports injuries

It is important to note that using the ED or an urgent care clinic does not take the place of routine screenings done in your doctor's office.

ACTIVITY – Where do you go?

Where would you go if...

- You fall down the stairs and sprain your ankle? _____
- You have a high fever of 103° F and cannot stop vomiting? _____
- You have severe ear pain on Sunday morning? _____
- You need a physical exam (checkup) to play a sport for school? _____
- You have a sore throat, stuffy nose and a cough? _____
- You are having trouble breathing? _____

Personal and Family Information

There are many situations in which you will need to know some important personal and family information. One of those situations is when you are talking to your doctor or using the health care system.

Family History

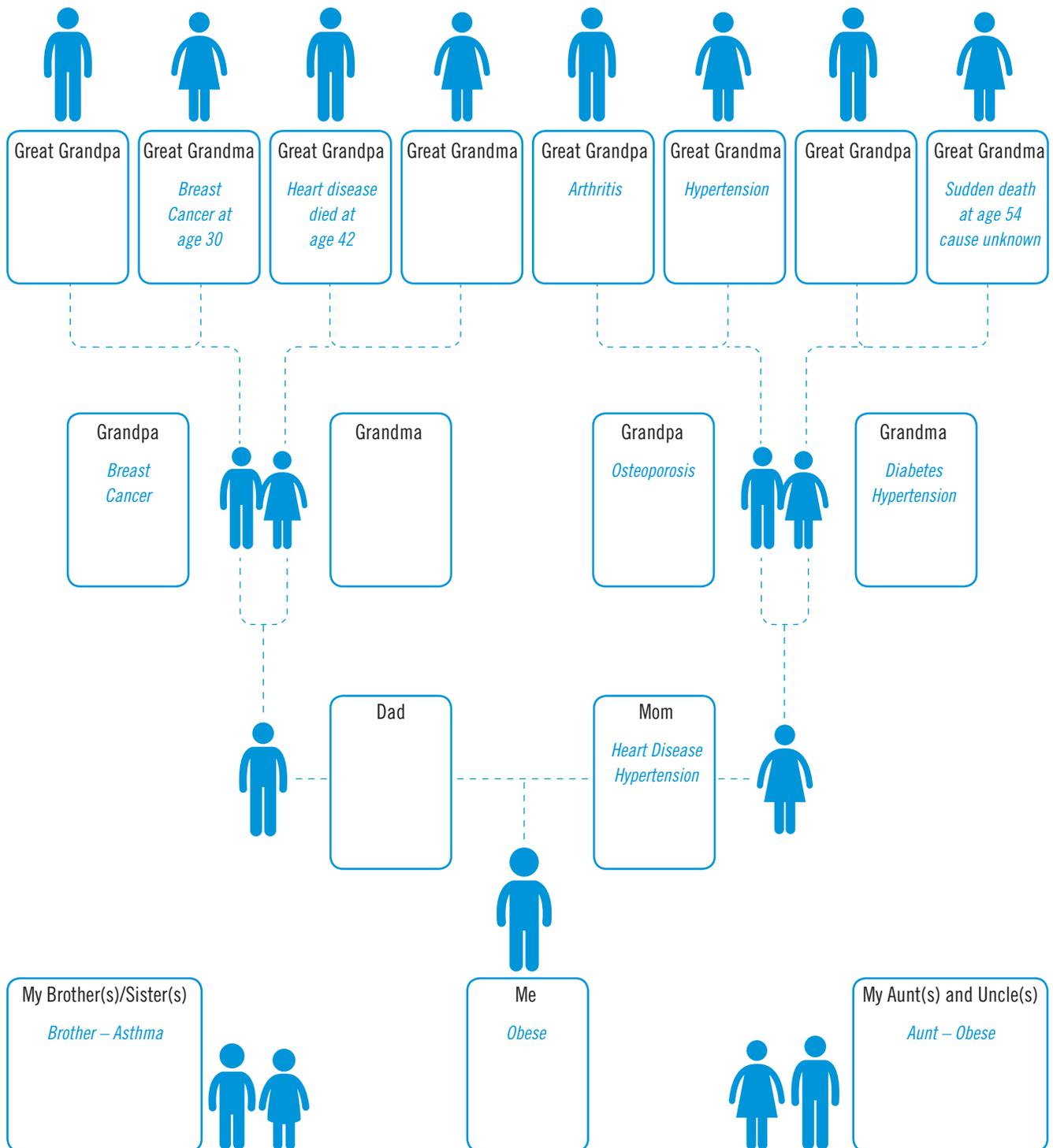
Knowing your family history is important so you can tell your doctor things about you that may affect your care. You will have common traits with your family such as the way you look and how you act. Other information about your family such as diseases or medical conditions can give the doctor information to determine any health-related risks you might have.

Where can you get this information?

Talk with any family members you can about the health history of your family. Then, share this information with your doctor. This will help your doctor learn more about you so they can provide the best care.

Health Issues

There are many things in your life that can affect your health. Diseases are passed down from your family members that you cannot control but are important to know. There are some things that you can control which can help you to lead a healthier life. These are the things that you should pay more attention to. The family tree below shows how each family member's health can affect their younger family members.



Is everyone at risk for the same diseases?¹²

Everyone is at risk for different diseases because everyone's family is different. For some individuals, risks for diseases inherited from family members may be higher than others. It is important to know key features of your family history. Here are some examples:

- Diseases that occur at an earlier age than expected (10-20 years before most people get the disease)
 - » *If your grandmother found out she had breast cancer at age 30*
- Disease in more than one close relative
 - » *Your dad and his brother both have high blood pressure*
- Disease that does not usually affect a certain gender
 - » *Breast cancer in a male*
- Certain combinations of diseases within a family
 - » *Breast and ovarian cancer, or heart disease and diabetes*

What happens if I am at risk for certain diseases?¹²

There are things you can control that can help lower your risk for disease, even if they run in your family. There are many healthy lifestyle behaviors you can do to decrease your risk:

- make healthy eating choices
- be physically active
- avoid tobacco, drugs and alcohol
- practice safe sexual activity

Getting regular checkups will help your doctor catch any changes in your body. If your doctor knows your family history, he or she can help you determine which tests and screenings you should get.

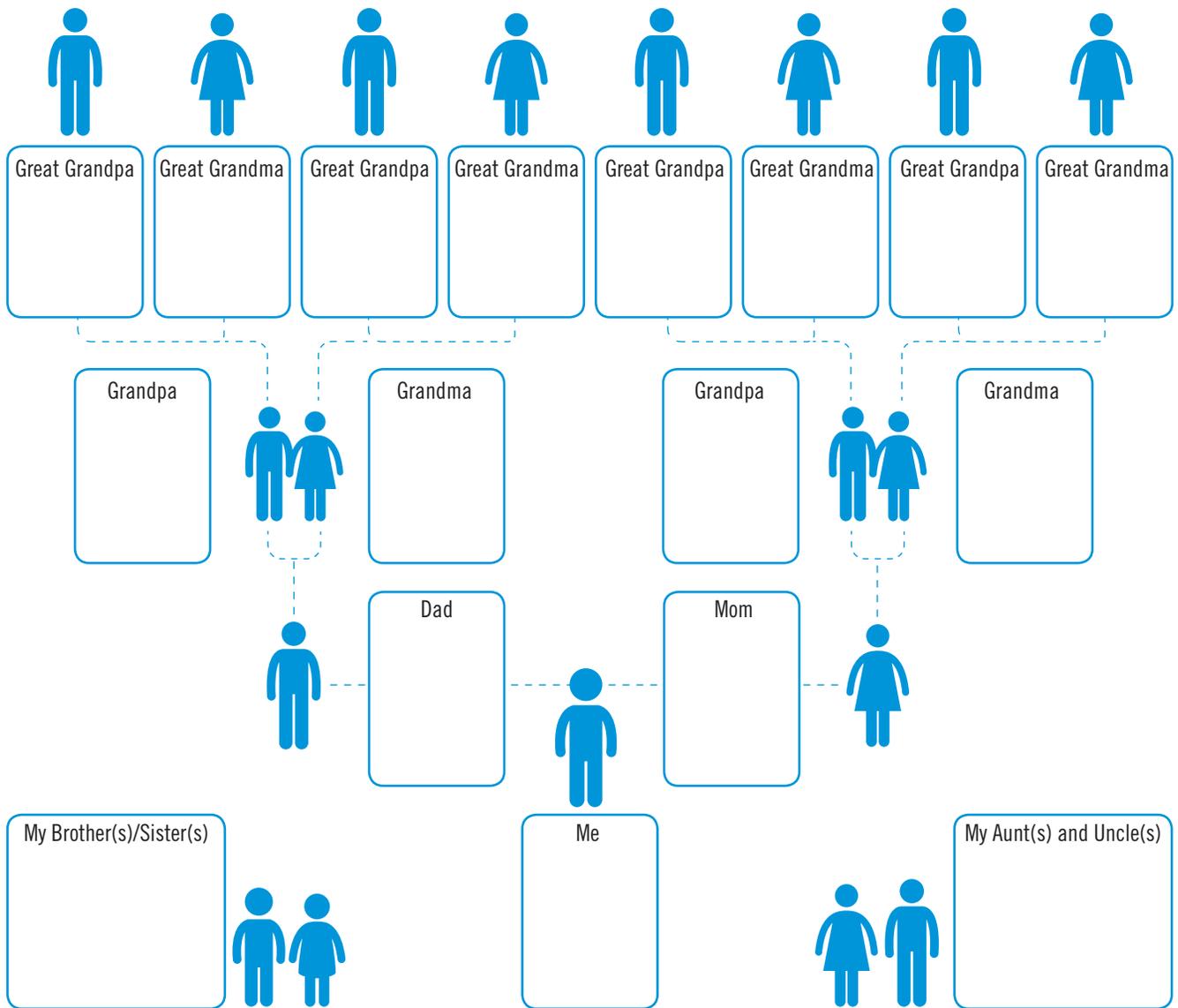
How do I learn my family history?¹²

One way to gather information from your parent(s), sibling(s), grandparent(s), aunt(s) and uncle(s) about their health history, is by asking the following questions:

- Were you born with any medical problems?
- Do you have any major medical problems/diseases?
- Have you had any major medical problems in the past?
- What age did your medical problem originally occur?
- What are some of the causes of death in the family?
 - » At what age did those family members pass away?
- What is your ethnic background? (What other countries did your family come from?)

As you gather information, keep track of it in a central place (refer to Module 4).

Fill in the family tree on the next page to the best of your ability. Did your family members have any medical problems or diseases? Are they still alive? If not, how old were they when they died? What did they die from?



Summary

You are reaching an age where it is important to start thinking more independently about your health and health care. It is important to know when and where to seek medical attention. You can save time and money by scheduling a doctor's appointment or visiting an urgent care clinic for non-emergencies. In case of an emergency you should visit the ED. It is also a good idea to keep track of your personal and family information. If you take the steps necessary to become your own health advocate, you will be very successful at navigating the health care system and maintaining good health.

Key Points to Remember

- Know your personal and family information.
- Understand your family health history and know if you are at risk for certain health problems.
- Understand any health risks associated with your ethnicity, sexual orientation and lifestyle factors.
- Build a good relationship with your primary care physician.
- Know when and how to seek the proper medical attention.
- Talk to a trusted adult about any questions or concerns you might have.

Resources

- List of common diseases/conditions: <http://www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions/>
- Racial and ethnic health issues: <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/remph.html>
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health <http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/index.htm>

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Module 2: Understanding Your Medical History

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Introduction

When you visit any health professional, it is extremely important to be able to talk to your doctor about your health and any concerns you may have. Knowing this information can help your doctor understand how to provide you with the best possible care and avoid anything that could be harmful to your health. Some factors about your personal health that you should know include symptoms, diagnosed conditions, allergies, medications and vaccinations. We will discuss and cover all of these topics in this lesson.¹

Describing Symptoms

What is a symptom?

Symptoms are signs our bodies use to tell us that there are health problems (e.g., vomiting, toothache, swelling, etc). Symptoms are warnings that there might be something wrong with your body. You should describe all of your symptoms to your doctor so they can determine any health issues you may have.²

Describing symptoms

It is important to give the doctor as many details as you can about how you are feeling. Make a written list of any symptoms you have before you go to your visit. Remember, doctors are not mind readers and will not know what is bothering you unless you speak up. If you are experiencing any symptoms you should be able to answer the following questions for your next doctor's visit:

- What symptoms are you having? (e.g., headache, fever, chest pain)
- How long have you had these symptoms?
- Are you taking any medications?
- If you have an injury, where does it hurt?
- How did this injury happen?
- How long ago did the injury happen?
- Is the pain getting worse?
- Does it feel different from the day before?

Allergies^{3, 4}

Sometimes symptoms are caused by substances your body doesn't recognize called allergens. Common allergens are:

- animal dander
- dust
- mold
- cockroaches
- pollen
- insect bites and stings
- foods (e.g., nuts, shellfish, wheat, etc.)
- latex
- medications (e.g., antibiotics)

The best way to know what allergens affect you is to get tested by a doctor. Allergens cause your body to react causing you to feel different symptoms such as stuffy nose, watery eyes, rash, trouble breathing, vomiting, etc. It is important to tell the doctor all of your allergies along with your other symptoms so you get the right diagnosis.

Diagnosed Conditions

What is a diagnosis?⁵

A diagnosis is when a doctor identifies a health condition after you display signs or symptoms associated with that condition. In other words, it is what the doctor says that you have after he or she examines and speaks with you. This is important because it will determine how your doctor needs to treat your illness or injury and whether you need further care from a specialist. For example, if you are diagnosed with a speech issue you might be sent to a speech therapist. If you are having trouble reading the eye chart during your exam, you might be sent to the eye doctor (optometrist/ophthalmologist). It is important to let your doctor diagnose you. Do NOT use the Internet.

What if I am diagnosed with a health condition?

If you are diagnosed with a health condition, your doctor can help you decide the best treatment options, and provide you with a plan to manage any conditions you might have. You might be given a medication, therapy or asked to make a lifestyle behavior change. By being a good health advocate and telling the doctor your correct symptoms, you will get the proper diagnosis and receive the proper treatment or medication. Once you have been given medication it is important that you understand how to use it properly; this is another step in understanding health care and being health literate.

Medications

There are several things to consider when taking medications. They come in many different forms and are used to treat a variety of conditions. Since they are chemicals, it is important to understand what they are for and how to properly use them. There are times when you may need to take more than one medication, so it is important to know the right way to take each medication. Below are some questions that you should consider and discuss with your doctor or local pharmacist to be sure that you are safely taking your medications.⁶

What is the medication used for?⁶

It's important to understand what medicine you are taking and what it treats.

- Example: If you have a headache, you want to make sure the drug you take treats headaches and is not just a medication for congestion and common cold symptoms.

Where can I purchase medications?⁷

Where you get medications depends on what type of medication it is. It can either be an over-the-counter drug (OTC) or a prescription drug.

- **Over-the-counter** – drugs that do not require a prescription from a doctor to purchase and can be purchased off the shelf at any local pharmacy or grocery store by any individual. If you are looking for a medication and cannot find it on the shelf it might be located behind the pharmacy counter. You will be able to tell because there is a card in the place the medicine would be located. This is usually cough, cold and allergy medicine with a decongestant. For example: Mucinex[®] would be on the shelf but Mucinex D[®] would be behind the pharmacy counter.
- **Prescription** – drugs that must have a prescription from a doctor and be purchased at a pharmacy. Prescriptions have the patient's name on them and should not be used by anyone else. Examples: amoxicillin, penicillin, and strong pain killers (ibuprofen 800mg)

Vaccines

Another important piece about being a good self advocate and being health literate is understanding your vaccination history and what vaccines are available to you.

What is a vaccine?¹⁰

Vaccines are weakened forms of various diseases that are injected (can also be oral or nasal) into the body and help reduce the chance that you'll be affected by those diseases. Since the disease is weak, it does not make you ill, but it does produce an immune response. Your body will remember that immune response when you come in contact with the disease in the future and will keep you from becoming seriously ill.

Vaccine Fact or Myth?¹¹⁻¹⁴

The following activity will provide several statements about various vaccinations. The statements will either be a fact or a myth. Check FACT if the statement is true or check MYTH if the statement is false. The lines are provided for note-taking purposes.

1. You can get the flu from the flu shot. FACT MYTH

2. Vaccines in children can cause autism. FACT MYTH

3. Children should still get vaccines for diseases that are no longer common. FACT MYTH

4. Living a healthy lifestyle will keep you free from diseases and vaccinations are not necessary.
 FACT MYTH

5. Vaccines generally have some side effects, but they are usually mild. FACT MYTH

6. The HPV vaccine is only given to girls because it protects against cervical cancer so boys don't need it.
 FACT MYTH

To find out which vaccines you have been given you can ask your doctor or the school nurse. If you were not vaccinated against something you feel you need or want; talk to your doctor because you can still get it, it is not too late.

Summary

It is important to know how to identify symptoms and other signs that will help the doctor find a solution to any medical issues you may have. When you share your information with medical professionals they can use that information to decide the best prevention and treatment options for you, resulting in better overall care.

Key Points to Remember

- Understand what symptoms are and how to describe them.
- Understand any current or previous diagnoses.
- Know any allergies you may have.
- Know any medications you take and how to properly use them.
- Know your vaccination history and stay up to date on your vaccinations.

Resources

Vaccine Schedule: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/index.html>

Poison Control Center: 1 (800) 222-1222

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Introduction

Do you know if you have insurance? Do you know who your carrier is? Do you carry your card on you? Do you think it is important to have your card with you? Do you know what a co-pay is? How long can you be on your parents'/caregivers' plan? All of this information can be very overwhelming, but don't worry; even most adults have trouble understanding everything. You are not alone. So what is health insurance?

What is health insurance?¹

Health care can be really expensive between doctor's visits, tests and screenings, Emergency Department visits and more. Most people don't have enough money to pay for all of their medical needs. Health insurance is a plan you can purchase that will help you cover your medical health care costs and keep you from paying all of that money out of pocket. Health insurance doesn't cover all costs, but it can significantly reduce what you have to pay out of your own pocket.

Why is health insurance important?

If you were to break your arm and have to go to the Emergency Department it would cost a lot of money for X-rays, casting and seeing the doctor. If you do not have insurance it could cost around \$5,000 but with insurance it could cost \$600. This is a \$4,400 difference. Not all insurances are the same. Some cover things that others do not. This is why it is important to know what your insurance covers.

Types of Health Insurance²

It is important to know the name of your insurance company. There are different types of health insurance you can have. The type of insurance you have depends on where you get it. If you are on your parents'/caregivers' plan or a plan from your job, it is known as private insurance (Blue Cross Blue Shield, Aetna). If you are not on your parents'/caregivers' you may qualify for government insurance (Medicaid) or purchase through the insurance exchange.

If you are on your parents'/caregivers' insurance most of you can now stay on it until you are 26 years old even if you don't go to college, are married, living somewhere else, or if you get a job that provides you with health insurance.



How do you get insurance?

If you do not have health insurance you can apply for Medicaid online or over the phone. If you are not sure if you have health insurance you can ask your parent(s)/caregiver(s). There is ***no cost*** to apply. You may qualify for free or low-cost care through Medicaid based on income and family size.

You enroll in insurance for one year at a time. Each year there is a period of time known as open enrollment. This gives you the chance to change your plan and find out what if any changes were made to your plan. It is important to know when the open enrollment is because it is different for everyone. There are some times when you can change your insurance in the middle of the year; these are called life-changing events. Things that are considered life-changing events are marriage, birth or adoption of a new child and change of employment.



Prescription Coverage/Plan

Your health insurance covers your medical costs. So for your broken arm, your health insurance would cover all or most of the costs for the visit to the Emergency Department. If you were given a prescription for medicine to help with your pain, your health insurance would not pay for this. You would need something called a prescription plan to help pay for the medicine.

What is a prescription plan?^{3,4}

Many times, an insurance plan will include prescription coverage (e.g., Medicaid) but sometimes it is a separate plan. For example, without a prescription plan, a specific medicine might cost \$80, but with a prescription plan you may be able to get the same medicine for \$15. There are different types of medicines that the pharmacy provides.

- **Brand name** – drugs that are made by large pharmaceutical companies and they cost more than generic drugs.
- **Generic** – drugs that have the same ingredients as the brand name drugs but are much cheaper.

So if your doctor prescribes you Zantac® (brand name) for heartburn the pharmacy may give you Ranitidine (generic) because the doctor told the pharmacist the generic was all right to use.

Your Insurance Card⁵

Once you have an insurance plan, you will receive an insurance card. This insurance card acts as proof that you have an insurance plan. Usually when you go to the doctor or pharmacy, they will ask to see your card so they can check your insurance plan and charge you the correct amount for their services. It is important to keep a copy of your card with you at all times. You may ask for an extra copy of your card for your parent(s)/caregiver(s). It should be kept with a photo ID and any other medical information (allergies, medications and medical problems) that is important for your care.

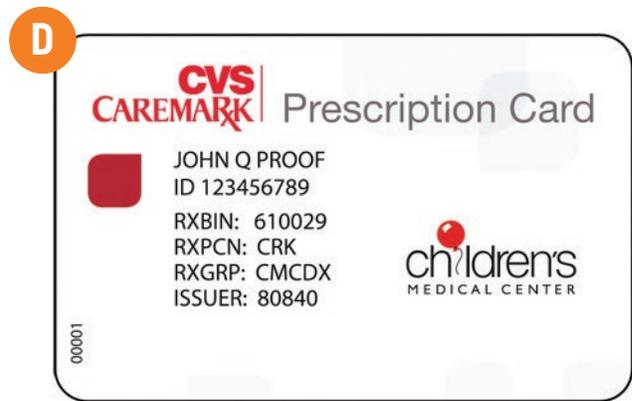
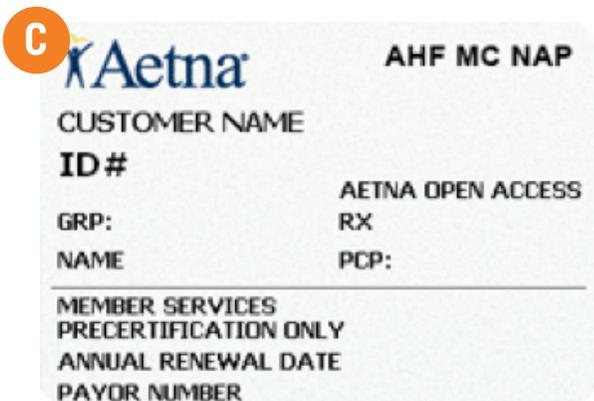
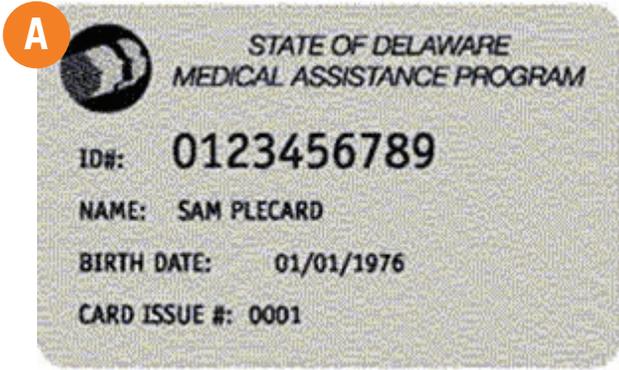
What information is on an insurance card?

Below is a sample insurance card along with a number next to each part of the card that you should know about. Keep in mind that this is just one example of an insurance card. Not every card will look like this, but they will all generally include the same information.

Sample National ID Card

		BlueCard® PPO	
1	Member Name JOHN DOE	PRIMARY CARE	\$20
2	Member ID Number IDC3HZN99999999	SPECIALIST	\$30
3	GROUP NUMBER 75999-0000 TYPE FAMILY BCBS PLAN CODES 280/780	EMERGENCY ROOM	\$125
		INPATIENT HOSP COPAY	\$150
		DENTAL DEDUCTIBLE	\$50
		DENTAL MAXIMUM	\$2500
		RXBN 004336	
		RXPCN HZRX	ISSUER (80840)
		RXGRP 0759990000	
			

Now that you know what an insurance card looks like, can you identify the various parts? Take a look at the insurance cards below and try your best to answer the questions that follow.



Which of the cards above covers prescriptions? _____

On the Medical Assistance Card (A) what is the ID number? _____

On the Blue Cross Blue Shield Card (B) what is the co-pay for an office visit? _____

On the CVS Caremark Card (D) what is the group number? _____

Know Your Rights

Confidentiality⁶

Some medical and other information about you will be kept private from everybody, including your parent(s)/caregiver(s). By having a good relationship with your doctor you should be comfortable talking to them alone about things you don't want your parent(s)/caregiver(s) to know about like your sexual activity. This information will be kept between you and your doctor. It is important to always be honest with your doctors about any symptoms or health worries that you may have. You do not have to worry about your doctor telling others about your personal information unless you tell them you are going to hurt yourself or someone else in which case the doctor will be sure you get appropriate care.

I am under the age of 18 and want to see the doctor for a problem I am having. Do my parent(s)/caregiver(s) have to know about it?

If you go to the doctor for information or questions about a sexually transmitted infection (STIs), you do **not** need your parents'/caregivers' permission. You can talk to the doctor and receive treatment and your visit will remain private. Your parent(s)/caregiver(s) will not be able to read the visit notes without your permission.⁷

Summary

Insurance can be a very overwhelming topic, especially since there are so many different types of insurance and so many different guidelines to follow. But with the cost of health care so high, it is extremely important to have an insurance plan to help cover some of those costs. If you take the time to learn about your insurance options and pick the plan that is best for you, you should be able to receive all of your medical services and health care needs without paying large amounts of money.

Key Points to Remember

- If your parent(s)/caregiver(s) have private insurance (through their job) you can stay on it until you are 26.
- Even if your parent(s)/caregiver(s) do not have insurance you can still get it, most likely through the government (Medicaid).
- Understand the types of insurance and how to get it if you don't have it.
- Know that a prescription plan can significantly reduce your medication costs.
- Know the parts of an insurance card and why they are important.
- Know that you have the ability to see your doctor by yourself.
- Carry your insurance card, a photo ID, allergies, medications and list of medical problems with you at all times.



Resources

My Health Passport - <https://www.sickkids.ca/myhealthpassport/>

Medicaid - <https://assist.dhss.delaware.gov/>

Apps for iPhone:

- Personal Hx
- Family Medical Manager
- Health Savvi

Apps for Android:

- Health Savvi
- FEMI – Family Medical Charting
- Med-info Keeper

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Module 4: Making/ Navigating Your Visit

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Introduction

Learning how to schedule a doctor's appointment is very important. Being prepared for your visit will make you feel more comfortable and could make it easier to talk to your doctor. Doing certain things in advance will save you time. Preparing questions for your doctor, filling out medical forms, and having a list of allergies and medications are a few things that will help your appointment run smoothly.

Scheduling an Appointment¹

Scheduling a doctor's appointment might sound difficult or overwhelming. Knowing the best times to call the office and how far in advance to schedule an appointment will speed up the process of making your visit. Ask how long you'll be with the doctor, so you are not surprised at how much time the appointment will take. Don't be afraid to ask these questions when you call. Below are a few tips that will help you make an appointment all by yourself.

Tips for scheduling an appointment:

- Pick out some dates for your appointment that would work for you and request them when asked.
- Have personal information ready (e.g., Social Security Number (SSN), insurance card) in case the doctor's office needs it.
- Describe any symptoms or signs that will help the receptionist understand your condition so they know how quickly you need to be seen.
- Try NOT to call during busy hours (e.g., just after opening, just before closing or during lunch time).
- Make sure to write down your appointment date and time so you don't forget.
- Female patients should schedule a gynecologist (doctor that specializes in women's health) appointment once they turn 18 or become sexually active.

Phone Call Etiquette

Practicing how to call your doctor's office will help you feel less nervous. It will also help you remember all the information you need to make the appointment. Make sure to be polite and respectful when calling. There is an example of how a phone call may go on the next page.



Mock phone call

Dr. Office: Dr. Lopez's office, how may I help you?

Patient: Hi, I'd like to make an appointment.

Dr. Office: No problem! Have you been to this office before?

Patient: Yes, I have.

Dr. Office: May I please have your name and date of birth.

Patient: My name is _____ and my birth date is _____.

Dr. Office: Thank you, (repeat the name they gave you). What kind of problem are you having?

Patient: I have recently been getting/having _____.

Dr. Office: How long have you been feeling this way?

Patient: (say how long)

Dr. Office: What day would you like to make the appointment for?

Patient: I can come in _____ at _____.

Dr. Office: OK, let me help you schedule something. How does _____ at _____ sound?

Patient: That sounds perfect.

Dr. Office: Okay, we'll see you then. Make sure to also bring your insurance card and a valid ID with you.

Patient: Okay. Thanks, bye.

Dr. Office: Bye.



Checking In + Filling Out Forms

When you check in at the doctor's office there are a few things that you will have to do:

- Provide your name and who you are there to see.
- Have a valid ID and your insurance card ready.
- You might have to pay a co-pay which can happen either when you check in or when you check out.
- If you have been seen in the office before you will be asked to check that the information they have is current.
- If you are a new patient:
 - » You will be asked to fill out some basic information about yourself (name, address, insurance, parent(s)/ caregiver(s) info, etc.).
 - » You will be asked to fill out some medical history.

To save time, it is a good idea to fill these forms before your doctor's appointment. Some offices will send you the forms through the mail or you can sometimes locate the files on their website.

Personal and Family Health History Form²

As a new patient you will have to fill out a registration form. These forms provide the doctor with your basic information (name, address, date of birth, insurance, etc.) as well as your personal and family medical history. If you are a returning patient, you will be asked to review your information and make sure it is still correct. Practice filling out the medical forms below using the scenario provided in class.

General information

Name

First: _____ Middle: _____

Last: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____

Place of Birth: _____

Race (Check any that apply)

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander White/Caucasian Black/African-American

American Indian/Alaska Native Asian-American Hispanic/Latino

Height: _____ feet _____ inches Weight: _____ pounds

Gender: Female Male

Marital Status: Single Married

When was your last physical exam? ____/____/____

Name of Doctor: _____ Telephone: (_____) _____

Personal contact information

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell Phone: (_____) _____

Family contact information

Parent/Guardian Name (1): _____ Relationship: _____

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell: (_____) _____ Work: (_____) _____

Parent/Guardian Name (2): _____ Relationship: _____

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell: (_____) _____ Work: (_____) _____

Do you have any siblings? Yes No

Name: _____ Age: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____

Emergency contact

Name of Contact: _____ Relationship: _____

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell: (_____) _____ Work: (_____) _____

Personal and Family Health History Form (continued)²

Lifestyle behaviors

Do you smoke? Yes No

If yes, how many packs a day do you smoke? _____

Do you drink alcohol? Yes No

If yes, how many times per week do you drink? _____

Do you drink caffeine (coffee, soda, tea)? Yes No

If yes, how many cups per day? _____

How many times per week do you exercise? _____

How many hours per day do you watch television? _____

How many hours of sleep do you get per night? _____

Do you have any problems sleeping? If so, please describe below. _____

Illnesses or surgeries

Please list any serious illnesses/injuries you have had in the past. Also list the date of the injury/illness.

Illness or Injury	Date
<i>Ex. Asthma</i>	<i>July 2010</i>
<i>Ex. Concussion</i>	<i>May 2, 2012</i>

Please list any surgeries you have had and the date they happened.

Surgery	Date
<i>Ex. Tonsillectomy (tonsils removed)</i>	<i>June 12, 2013</i>



Personal and Family Health History Form (continued)²

Current medications¹

Please list any medications you take. Include both prescription and over-the-counter medications.

Name	Dose (How much)	How many times per day
<i>Ex. Fexofenadine (Allegra)</i>	<i>180 mg (1 tablet)</i>	<i>Twice a day</i>

Allergies

Please list any known allergies you have and the type of reaction.

Allergy	Reaction
<i>Ex. Peanuts</i>	<i>Difficulty breathing</i>
<i>Ex. Pollen</i>	<i>Itchy eyes</i>
<i>Ex. Penicillin</i>	<i>Rash</i>

Personal and Family Health History Form (continued)²

Personal and family history

Have you or anyone in your family ever had any of the following? Please check either the yes or no column. If you check yes, please note which family member or members had the health problem.

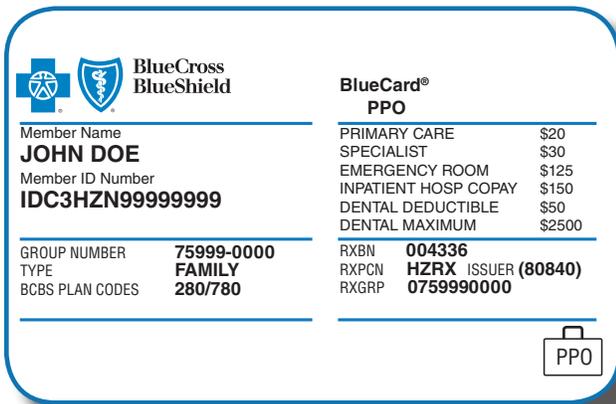
You may choose from the family members listed below. If someone in your family has had cancer, please note the type of cancer in the designated space.

Mother Father Grandfather Grandmother Aunt
 Uncle Brother Sister Cousin Myself

Health Problem	Yes	No	Relationship
Alzheimer's Disease			
Anemia			
Arthritis			
Asthma			
Breathing Problems			
Cancer Type:			
Cancer Type:			
Cancer Type:			
Congenital Hearing Loss			
Diabetes - Type I or Type II			
Drug Addiction			
Emphysema			
Seizures			
Glaucoma			
Heart Attack			
Heart Disease			
Hypertension (High blood pressure)			
High Cholesterol			
Kidney Disease			
Liver Disease			
Lung Disease			
Mental Illness			
Overweight/Obesity			
Sickle Cell Disease			
Sleep Disorders			
Stomach/Intestinal Disease			
Stroke			

Once you have filled out the registration form you will hand it back in to the front desk and wait for your name to be called. If you are a returning patient, you will not have to fill out a registration form again. If any of your information has changed (e.g., address, new insurance) you must let the doctor's office know.

Insurance Card Information³



Spouse/Guarantor

First Name: _____
Last Name: _____
Social Security Number: _____
Date of Birth: ____/____/____ Sex: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Telephone (Home): (____) _____
Telephone (Work): (____) _____

Insurance

Primary Insurance Carrier: _____
Identification Number: _____
Group Number: _____
Insurance Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Policy Holder/Insured: _____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____
Policy Holder Employer: _____ Relationship to Insured: _____

Secondary Insurance Carrier: _____
Identification Number: _____
Group Number: _____
Insurance Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Policy Holder/Insured: _____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____
Policy Holder Employer: _____ Relationship to Insured: _____

The Visit

When your name is called, a nurse or medical assistant will take you back to the room. They will take your height, weight, temperature and blood pressure. They will also ask you the reason for your visit, what medications you are currently taking, the name of your pharmacy and any other concerns you might have. You will be asked the reason for your visit several times while you are in the doctor's office, this is to make sure you get the correct diagnosis. So it is important to be a good self advocate and tell the doctor everything you are feeling.

If you are there for a wellness visit (physical or checkup)

- The doctor will ask if you have any concerns and perform an exam.

If you are there for a sick or injury visit

- The doctor will ask you how you are feeling (symptoms), how long you have been feeling this way and perform an exam.

The doctor will give you a lot of information during your visit. If you don't understand, it is important to ask questions until you do.

Put your self advocacy skills to work

- It's important to tell your doctor personal information, even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.⁴ Be honest.
- Make sure to let your doctor know about any changes since your last visit such as any changes in your life that may be causing you stress (e.g., death in the family, moving to a new city, new job).⁴
- As a young adult, you are responsible for listening to and remembering what your health care professionals tell you. Most people can recall only two or three things their doctors tell them, so it's a good idea to write down the information or instructions.⁵

What if I don't understand?⁶

Understanding is not only linked to being a good self advocate but also being health literate. Health literacy doesn't have to do with how smart you are. It has to do with asking questions when you don't understand, reading information the doctor gives you and following proper instructions. Sometimes it may be difficult to understand what your doctor is trying to explain. Ways to increase your health literacy is to ask questions you have about your health and keep asking until you understand. It's a good idea to write down and take your questions with you to help you remember *ALL* of them. The next time you see your doctor, take these questions with you and *ASK!* If you don't understand your doctor there are a few things you might say:

- Please tell me more about that.
- Could you explain that to me again?
- Could you write that down for me?
- Is there something you can give me to read?

Meeting With Your Doctor Independently

When you are alone with your doctor you can talk about some things you may not want to discuss while your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are in the room. It is important to feel comfortable with your doctor and learn to speak up for yourself, be a good self advocate. They have heard and seen it all. Your doctor will be more than happy to answer any health questions you may have. It's okay to write down and take your questions with you to help you remember what to ask or you can give the written questions to your doctor for him or her to read directly. It would also be helpful to prepare to answer your doctor's questions. After a few visits, you may notice that your doctor asks some of the same questions during each visit.

Practicing the Visit

During your visit the doctor will ask you questions. Below is an example of the questions you may be asked if you were sick with a high fever of 101°F and have been vomiting.

Commonly Asked Questions	Answer to the Questions
What brings you into the office today?	Don't feel well
How are you feeling? (any symptoms)	Fever of 101°F and vomiting
Where does it hurt?	Stomach
How long have you felt this way?	2 days
Have you taken any medications for these symptoms?	Tylenol®
How often?	Every 4 hours
Do you have any known allergies?	Cats
What happens when you are around cats?	Rash, itchy skin, watery eyes
Are you currently taking any medications?	Insulin
Do you smoke or drink? If yes, how often?	Smoke, 2 vapor cigarettes a day
How many hours do you usually sleep at night?	5
Are there any new changes in your life or new stressors? (e.g., new school, death in family, new job)	A lot of school projects due at the same time
Females: date of your last period	Yesterday

Checking Out + Follow-Up Appointment

Once you are done with your doctor's visit it will be time to check out. The doctor will usually give you a paper or medical chart to hand in during check-out. This paper will let the front desk know if you have any prescriptions or need a follow-up appointment. You will usually check out at the same front desk where you first checked in. During check-out you will:

- Hand in medical chart.
- Pay the co-pay (if one is required by insurance).
- Make a follow-up appointment if needed.

A follow-up appointment is usually made to check if the patient's health is improving. If you are sick and are given medications the doctor will want to follow up to see if the medications are working and if you are feeling better. The health care provider at the front desk will ask you what day is best to make another appointment. They will also inform you if you have any electronic prescriptions that were sent to the pharmacy or, if you have a written prescription, you will take it to the pharmacy yourself. Once you leave the office:

- Go to the pharmacy and pick up prescriptions (if the doctor has prescribed any).
- Write down when your next appointment will be so you do not forget.
- Write down any questions you may have forgotten to ask so you can ask on your next visit.

Filling your prescriptions

The process of filling your prescription will start in the doctor's office. You must tell your doctor if you are currently taking any medications including OTC or herbal medicines. It is important to be honest about your medications because one medication could affect other medications that your doctor prescribes to you. Some doctors will give you a paper prescription but most prescriptions are now done electronically. Before going to the doctor, it is a good idea to ask your parent(s)/caregiver(s) which pharmacy your family goes to for their prescriptions because your doctor will ask which pharmacy you use. There are also a few things you should know before picking up your prescription including:

- Does your insurance cover the medication? If so, bring your insurance card with you.
- What is the location and phone number for the pharmacy.
- Find out if you have a co-pay and bring the money with you.
- Bring the written prescription if it is not sent electronically by your doctor.⁷

Summary

It is important to learn how to schedule a doctor's appointment. Giving the doctor the right information will help him or her make sure you are getting what you need during the appointment. Be prepared and bring any information (e.g., insurance card, Social Security Number, co-pay) with you to your appointment. This will also help you fill out personal and family medical forms. If possible, fill out the forms before your appointment so you can ask your parent(s)/caregiver(s) for help. Be honest with your doctor and don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions.

Key Points to Remember

- Have personal information ready when calling a doctor's office.
- Know your medical history before meeting with medical professionals.
- If possible, fill out medical forms before your visit.
- Describe all of your symptoms correctly and how long you have had them.
- Ask plenty of questions when you don't understand something.



Resources

- MyHealth Passport is a customized, wallet-size card that gives you instant access to your medical information. It can be used when you go to a new doctor, visit an emergency room or are writing your first novel and want the names of your medications for your hero <https://www.sickkids.ca/myhealthpassport/>
- Android apps
 - » HealthSavvi
 - » FEMI – Family Medical Charting
 - » Med info keeper
- iPhone apps
 - » Personal Hx
 - » Family Medical Manager
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