

# 10 tips for a healthy doctor-patient partnership



At CenterWell Senior Primary Care, we believe patients should play an active role in their health journey—and part of that is building relationships with their healthcare providers. Use these tips to get the most out of your time with your healthcare team.

**10: PCPs are “primary” care physicians.** PCPs are your main connection to many types of care. The PCP is the one who can make sure that you get all of the screenings, vaccines and tests you need. PCPs can help you find other experts when you need them. And his or her office is where all of your records from all of your specialists can be together, in one place. That gives your doctor a great picture of your overall health and your healthcare needs.

## What types of doctors are PCPs?

Internists, family doctors, gerontologists or OB/GYNs.

**Remember:** Relationships count. Research shows that when doctors understand their patients well, the patients tend to manage their health conditions better.<sup>1</sup>

## 9: There are many different types of healthcare providers.<sup>2</sup>

Doctors aren't the only healthcare providers you may see. Others include nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs), registered nurses (RNs) and therapists. If you're unsure what someone's role is, ask!

Doctors may be medical doctors (M.D.s) or doctors of osteopathic medicine (D.O.s). Both are licensed to practice medicine, but their approaches may be different.

**8: Find a practice that “fits.”** Most patients report being happy with their doctors' offices.<sup>3</sup>

## What factors affect a patient's level of satisfaction?

- Building trust and time spent with the doctor
- Compassion and clear communication from the doctor
- Friendly and accommodating office staff

## What are some of the characteristics of doctors you like the most?

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## What are specific things you like most or that matter most about the doctors' offices you visit?

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**7: Every patient is different.** Patients often fit into one of three different personality types.

**Which do you think matches your healthcare personality?**

**Traditionalist**

This person relies on the doctor for information and instructions.

**Tip:** If this fits your personality, make the effort to ask questions or ask for the information you need to be healthy.

**Information seeker**

This person does a lot of research about medical issues of concern.

**Tip:** If this fits your personality, listen to your doctor as well as share information with your doctor. Plus, focus on just a few key points during the visit.

**Distracted patient**

This person is interested in learning more, but is too busy or concerned about other things to fully focus.

**Tip:** If this fits your situation, take a few minutes to think about your goals for the visit before you arrive at the doctor's office.

**6: Your doctor's visit starts before you even get there.** It's important to find a doctor you can trust and have confidence in.

Start planning for a good visit by letting the office know your goals for the appointment. If you have special concerns, the office staff may be able to schedule you for a longer visit.

**5: Share your "secrets" with your PCP.** Some health problems can be embarrassing, but your PCP is the key to finding solutions. Your doctor also needs to know if you're not following his or her advice or taking your medicines correctly.

**Conversation starters:** Adapt these sentences to share important health information with your doctor.

- It seems that I'm having trouble with (\_\_\_\_\_) more often.
- I find that I'm not (hungry, happy, feeling well, (\_\_\_\_\_) like I used to.
- I don't enjoy (\_\_\_\_\_) like I used to.
- Since I started that medicine or treatment, I feel (\_\_\_\_\_).

**4: You might not like what your doctor's telling you.**

**Remember:** Your doctor has a responsibility to keep you informed, even if you don't like what you're hearing. Try to listen to your doctor's advice and ask questions.

Your doctor may deliver bad news from time to time. Give yourself time to digest it and then talk about it when you're ready.

**Do you have any concerns you'd like to discuss at your next appointment?**

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**Which conversation starter can you use to bring it up?**

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### 3: When you disagree, keep the conversation open and honest.

## How should you handle an instance when you don't agree with your doctor?

### 1. Show respect.

Be honest about how you're feeling, but also be polite.

### 2. Be as clear as you can.

What don't you agree with? Do you want treatment, but the doctor's not offering it? Do you want a different treatment or want to avoid certain side effects? The clearer you can be, the better your doctor can help you and offer you different choices.

### 3. Ask for a second opinion.

If you do not plan to follow your doctor's guidance, let him or her know. Ask for the name of another doctor or specialist, so you can get a second opinion. Be sure to check with your insurance company to find out the process for seeking a second opinion.

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**2: Bring your list.** A list can help you and your doctor remember the things you want to talk about so you can focus on what's important to you.



### Share with your doctor:

- All medicines and supplements you take
- Any symptoms or concerns you've had since your last visit
- Any new conditions that have come up in your family, like heart disease or diabetes
- Any hospital visits or emergency room visits that your doctor is not aware of



### You might ask your doctor:

- Questions about a medical condition, medicine, tests or other treatments
- Questions about side effects of any medicines, especially if the side effects are unpleasant
- Questions about medical tests and screenings and the results of those tests
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



### Who works with your PCP? Ask:

- Who might see you if your doctor is not available?
- What specialists does your doctor work with?
- Can your PCP admit you to a certain hospital? If not, who would care for you during a hospital stay?
- What should you do if you have questions or medical concerns after office hours? Does the PCP have weekend appointments or late-evening appointments?

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**1: You have the power to ask for what you need.** Write down all of your questions. If you find that your list is long, help your doctor focus on the two to three things that are most important to you. Ask if you can make another appointment if you'd like to discuss the other items.

- Learn all you can to make a good choice for your PCP and the practice
- Share important information with your doctor, including things you're embarrassed about and information you've learned since your last visit
- Find out about your risk of developing medical conditions
- Ask your doctor about things that are most important to you, including how to treat and prevent medical conditions

