

Communicating With Your Doctor

Professionals on your medical care team need to work in partnership with you. Forming a partnership with your doctor that includes good communication is very important and often takes time and effort. Your doctor should develop a reasonable plan for meeting your needs. Over time, as the disease progresses, these needs will change. Regular doctor visits (about every six months or right away if a sudden change occurs) will help ensure the best care possible.

1. Be Prepared

Doctors only have a limited amount of time to spend with each patient. You can help by being prepared. Make a list of the types of issues you want to discuss with your doctor.

- Changes in symptoms
- General health
- Caregiver health
- Help needed
- Questions to ask

2. Ask Questions

If you don't understand something, ask questions until you do. Don't be afraid to speak up and to share your point of view.

- Answer the doctor's questions honestly and to the best of your ability.
- Ask the doctor to explain any tests or new medications prescribed.

3. Gather Information

Make sure you understand what is being explained to you. Taking written or recorded information home with you can help you remember information and instructions any time you need to. Ask your doctor to write down his or her instructions to you. If you still have trouble understanding, ask where you can go for more information. Your doctor is a good source of accurate information you can trust.

- Answer the doctor's questions honestly and to the best of your ability.
- Ask the doctor to explain any tests or new medications prescribed.

4. Assessment

At each visit, your doctor will conduct an evaluation or assessment. You can help by keeping track of changes in condition and report them to the doctor. Whether you are the patient or the caregiver, keeping a list of questions, concerns, changes in routine, etc., may be helpful. Review the following questions before your next visit and write down the answers.

- Have you noticed changes in health, memory or mood?

- When did you first notice the change?
- How often does it happen? When does it happen?

Be specific. For example, “Last Tuesday, I (my husband) got lost on the way home from the store. It was scary.”

5. Treatment

Your doctor may prescribe medication or other treatments. It's your job to keep track of how things are working (or not working). Keep a list of all prescription and over-the-counter medications and bring it to each doctor visit. You may also want to bring the actual bottles of medication to each doctor visit.

- Bring a list of all medications, both over-the-counter (vitamins, aspirin) and prescription.
- Are the prescribed treatments working? What has improved? What has gotten worse?
- Have you noticed any side effects of the medications? Are they causing problems?
- Have you noticed any new problems that may need treatment?

6. Be Understanding

Balance assertiveness with respect and understanding. Although it's important to let your doctor know your needs or if you are dissatisfied, it's equally important to voice appreciation for positive aspects of your communication and the treatment being received

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research.