



Making it easier to talk with your doctor

MADISON, Wis. - Good communication between you and your doctor is one of the most important parts of receiving good health care. Unfortunately, talking to your doctor isn't always easy.

"Taking an active role in your health care puts the responsibility for good communication on both you and your doctor. This is especially important for older people who may have more health conditions and treatments to discuss," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension program specialist in aging.

A new, revised edition of a National Institute on Aging booklet, *Talking with Your Doctor*, offers many tips and suggestions. The booklet covers choosing a doctor you can talk to, getting ready for an appointment, describing symptoms, asking about medical tests and medications, discussing sensitive subjects, and involving family and friends. It also includes worksheets to help older adults prepare for an appointment and track their medications. You can go online to <http://www.niapublications.org/pubs/talking/index.asp> to read or download the free booklet, or contact the National Institute of Aging (NIA) at 1-800-222-2225.

In the past, the doctor typically did the talking and the patient listened. Today, a good patient-doctor relationship is more of a partnership. You and your doctor can work as a team, along with nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, and other health care providers.

"This means asking questions if the doctor's explanations or instructions are unclear," Brintnall-Peterson says. "It also means bringing up problems even if the doctor doesn't ask, and letting the doctor know if you have concerns about a treatment or something that has changed in your daily life."

All of this is true at any age. Your health has a big impact on other parts of your life. In fact, it helps the doctor—and you—if he or she knows about the non-medical parts of your life, as these things can make a difference in decisions about your health care.

A National Institutes of Health web site designed specifically for older people features a wide variety of health topics presented in a simple format. It also has a "talking web" feature that reads the text to you. Visit this web site at www.nihseniorhealth.gov

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