



## **Making The Most Of Your Doctor Visit**

Living with epilepsy usually means that you will regularly consult with doctors and other specialists about your health and treatment. Working as a team with your health care providers will help to ensure that you receive the most out of these relationships. Your self-knowledge and the physician's expertise are key elements in helping you live a successful life with epilepsy.

### **Share Information**

The information that you provide to your doctor is very important for your epilepsy care and general health. When recounting your symptoms, be as specific as you can. Your doctor will guide you with questions, but try to be accurate: occurrences that may seem inconsequential may be important. Ensure your doctor is aware about other medical conditions or health concerns that you may have. Be sure to mention if you are seeing other practitioners for your physical or mental health.

Be open to discuss potentially sensitive topics with your doctor. Whether it's a question about sexual function or the price of a drug, you should not be afraid to bring it up. Chances are they've heard it before. Answer questions honestly and completely, including those on topics such as alcohol use, mood, or incontinence.

### **Ask Questions**

Write down your questions about epilepsy, treatment, and related topics ahead of time. Pick a few questions that are most important to you to ask at your next appointment. Make your questions open-ended and specific to your needs.

Some common questions are:

- Is there a known cause for my seizures?
- Am I likely to have more seizures in the future without treatment?
- Is there any laboratory or other tests that need to be done? If so, when and how will I get the results?
- What activities should I be cautious about?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose of my medication?
- Should I be taking any vitamins or additional supplements?

If you don't understand what the doctor is telling you, ask him or her to explain it again. Your doctor can paraphrase, use different words, or even draw or show you a diagram.

Not all your questions need to be answered by the doctor. Often, a nurse can answer your questions, and may have more time to explain. Nurses are a great resource!

Your tone of voice, facial expression, posture, and gestures can help you get your questions across more clearly. When talking with your physicians, look them in the eyes, keep good posture, and lean forward as you talk. Gestures can help you feel more comfortable and may help you explain yourself. Match your facial expression with your spoken words.



Before you leave, make sure you understand any instructions, additional tests needed, changes in medication, or other treatments. Find out when to return for a follow-up visit.

### **Record Your Seizures**

Observations of seizures from yourself and others are a major part of helping your doctor diagnose and treat epilepsy. After a seizure has occurred, record:

- What happened before the seizure
- When the seizure occurred
- What happened during the seizure (awareness, movements, sensations, parts of body involved, etc.)
- How long the seizure lasted
- What happened after the seizure
- Any disruptions in medication schedule
- Possible triggers or factors that may have made the seizure more likely to occur

Various seizure recording forms and journals are available to help you record this information. The BC Epilepsy Society has a version available at [www.bcepilepsy.com](http://www.bcepilepsy.com)

Keep extra copies of these records for yourself, just in case you are asked to leave the documents with the doctor. Consider putting together a notebook or folder to organize and maintain all of your records.

### **Keep Track of Your Medications**

Keep a record of all medications that you are taking. Include the dosages and how often they're taken. This includes prescribed medications, vitamins and supplements, herbal remedies, and over-the-counter medications. Bring this record to your doctor appointments. This information is important because some medications may not be safe or effective when used concurrently.

If applicable, keep a list of antiepileptic medications that have been previously prescribed and information about why it was changed.

Check whether you need renewals for any of your prescriptions prior to your doctor appointment. Ask for prescription renewals during the appointment.

### **Educate Yourself**

Learning about epilepsy and seizures will help you make the most of your relationship with your healthcare providers. This will also enable you to ask specific questions regarding your condition. There are many information resources that are useful for learning more about epilepsy. It is best to rely on documents written and/or approved by medical professionals. The BC Epilepsy Society offers a resource library with books, DVDs, pamphlets and articles. The staff at your doctor's office or clinic may also be able to provide you with various information resources.

### **Ask Others For Support**

Sometimes, people like to bring a friend or family member to an appointment. A companion can help you relax, remind you of questions you'd like to ask, and help you remember what the doctor said. If you need personal time with the doctor, the companion can sit in the waiting room. Choose someone who is a good listener and who won't interrupt, dominate the visit, or ask too many of their own questions.

### **Put Your Best Foot Forward**

Doctors, like anyone, need to be treated with respect and in a friendly manner. A friendly greeting and genuine gratitude can go a long way in developing a good working relationship with your doctor.

Medical appointments can involve waiting longer than expected due to medical emergencies or other delays. Bring reading materials or activities for yourself and any other individuals accompanying you. Stay calm to help you stay focused and make the most of your visit.

Building a successful partnership with your doctor takes time and effort. Working as a team with your doctor puts you on the right path to best obtain seizure control and good health.

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**You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.**

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