



Understanding your doctors and other caregivers

It can be difficult to understand what your doctors and other caregivers are telling you about your care and treatment. This brochure has questions and answers to help you understand caregivers.

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Questions to ask your caregivers

- Is there someone who can help you understand your doctor, nurse, and other caregivers?
- Is there someone who can help you understand how to take your medicine?
- Is there any written information in your language?
- Is there any written information in your language that is easy to read?
- Is there someone who speaks your language who can help you talk to caregivers?
- Is there a support group for people like you? For people with your illness or condition?
- Are there other resources for you?

What can you do if you don't understand what your caregiver is saying?

Tell them you don't understand. Use body language. If you don't understand shake your head to show that "No, I don't understand." Ask lots of questions. By asking questions you're helping them understand what you need.

What can you do if they explain and you still don't understand?

Tell them you still don't understand. Try to be as clear as possible about what you do not understand. Caregivers have a duty to help you understand. You should not leave until you understand what to do and what is happening to you.

What if the caregiver is rushed and doesn't have time to answer your questions?

Ask them if you need to schedule another appointment when they can answer your questions.

What can you do if you speak another language?

Ask for someone who speaks your language. This person can help you talk to caregivers. This person should work for the hospital or health center. Their job is to help people who speak other languages. This person may not be in the office. He or she may be on the telephone. You have the right to get free help from someone who speaks your language. Ask if there is paper work in your language.

What can you do if you have trouble reading? Or if you cannot read?

Don't be embarrassed. Tell your caregivers. They can help you. They can explain paper work to you. They may even have paper work that is easy to read and understand.

Your doctor's instructions are not clear. Should you try to figure it out yourself?

No. Instructions from your doctor or others are important. Tell them what you think the instructions are. Tell them if they need to write down the instructions. Tell them if you have a family member or friend who helps you take your medicine. Ask the doctor to have someone talk to your family member or friend, too.

What if you don't understand written instructions?

Tell your caregivers. Tell them that you need to have the instructions read to you. Tell them you need instructions that are easy to read. Or that you need instructions in your language.

What can you do if you don't understand the instructions for your medicine?

Tell your doctor if you need help. Tell them what you think the instructions are. Tell them if you don't understand how to take your medicine. Tell them if you don't understand when to take your medicine. Some patients don't understand and take too much or too little of the medicine. That can be dangerous.

How can you remember all of your medicines?

Ask for a card for your medicines. Ask your caregiver to help you write down the medicines and the amount you take. Bring the card with you every time you go to the doctor.

The doctor says I need to have a "procedure." What does that mean?

A procedure can be an operation or a treatment. A procedure can be a test with special equipment. You might be put to sleep or a part of your body might be numbed. Ask questions about what will be done to you. If you speak another language ask for someone who speaks your language. Even if you're in the emergency room you need to understand what will happen to you.

What is informed consent?

Informed consent means that you know how your illness or condition will be treated. It means that you agree to the operation or treatment. It means that you understand the risks. That you know about other treatments available to you. And that you know what can happen if you aren't treated. You will be asked to sign paper work after you agree to the treatment. You need to decide if you will sign or not sign the paper work only after you understand all that was explained to you.

You don't understand the paper work you're given to fill out. What can you do?

Ask caregivers to explain the paper work. Ask them if they can help you fill it out.

Your caregiver asked you to do something that is against your culture or religion. What can you do?

Tell your caregiver about your culture. Or tell them about your religious beliefs. Explain to them what you need to do. When they know what is important to you, they can understand better how to take care of you. There may be a way to meet your caregiver's needs and your needs.

Where can you find more information about your illness or condition?

You can ask another doctor for their opinion. Visit your local library. Ask the people who work at the library for help. If you use a computer, you can look on the Internet. You can try the Medical Library Association by typing in www.mlanet.org/resources/consumr_index.html. Or try Medline Plus by typing in <http://medlineplus.gov/>. You should talk to your doctor about what you learn.

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