

3.14 Tips for Talking with the Doctor

To the teacher:

The handout on the following two pages contains a lot of important tips for communicating effectively with health care providers in the United States.

- The tip sheets were written in simple English for native speakers of English. They may be useful in their entirety for higher level ESOL learners.
- You can use the tips as a reference tool for yourself for designing lessons for lower level learners.
- For lower level learners, you can present individual tips that you think might be helpful for your learners.
- You can also distribute the full handout to lower level learners for them to share with a friend or family member who speaks more English.
- You may have these tips translated into learners' native languages for them to have as a reference.





Tips for Talking with the Doctor

- 1. Doctor appointments can be VERY short – make a plan beforehand.** Write your questions down at home before your appointment. Show the doctor your list of questions. Put the **most important questions first** so you have time to get to the most important answers.
- 2. Tell the doctor if you don't understand something he or she says.** Ask the doctor to explain in simpler words. It is the doctor's job to explain things clearly. It is your job to ask questions if you don't understand.
- 3. It is OK to ask the doctor to wait for you to write down the answers to your questions.** If you need help, you can ask the doctor to write the answers for you. Make sure you can read the doctor's handwriting! 😊 You may also record the discussion to listen to it later. Some cellphone apps can record your doctor's appointment.
- 4. If possible, take a friend, family member, or caregiver with you** to help you communicate about your health at the doctor's appointment. Make sure it's someone you trust.
- 5. Tell the doctor if you have had any other medical appointments, ER visits, or hospitalizations since your last visit.**
- 6. Let your doctor know all the medications you are taking,** their doses, and when you take them. **This includes medications other doctors prescribed.** This also includes non-prescription medications, herbs, and vitamins.
- 7. Let the doctor know if there are any big or new stresses in your life.** Stress can affect your health conditions.
- 8. Be honest with the doctor about your health concerns, even if they are difficult to talk about.** The doctor may have help for you. Be sure to tell the doctor if you are having problems with:
 - Sexual function
 - Urinary or bowel function (peeing or pooping)
 - Memory loss
 - Depression or anxiety
 - Alcohol or medication abuse



9. **Tell the doctor if you feel the doctor is speaking too fast.** Ask the doctor to slow down.
10. **Before your appointment ends, check your understanding with the doctor.** For example, you could say: "If I understand you correctly, my problem is_____. To treat it I should_____. I need to call you if_____. Is that right, doctor?"
11. **Before you leave the doctor's office, make sure you understand:**
- What the problem is
 - What the treatment plan is
 - How long before you should see improvement of the problem
 - What side effects you should call the doctor about
 - If you need any more tests
 - When you should see the doctor again
12. **It's OK to disagree with a doctor.** Be sure to have a discussion with the doctor and explain why you disagree.
13. **If you think you can't follow through** with a doctor's recommendations, tell the doctor this and explain why. Maybe the two of you can come up with a better idea for you.
14. **It's OK to ask for a second opinion from another doctor.** Sometimes insurance will pay for a second opinion, and sometimes it won't.
15. **Sometimes it's OK to speak a little firmly with the doctor or doctor's office staff.** Doctor's offices can be very rushed and sometimes it's hard to get people to take enough time to give you the help you need. Mistakes happen when people are too rushed. In health care, it is sometimes necessary to be the "squeaky wheel," even if it doesn't feel comfortable. If you don't understand what is going on or you are not getting answers to your questions, it is OK to complain. Sometimes the office manager is a good person to complain to and sometimes the doctor is.

