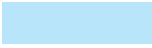







Patient Tips!

The “TEN” Do’s and Don’t’s for:

-  • *PREPARING FOR OFFICE VISIT (Pages 2-3)*
-  • *THE OFFICE VISIT (Pages 4-6)*
-  • *THE HOSPITAL SETTING (Pages 7-9)*
-  • *SURGERY (Pages 10-12)*

General Information

- Be able to provide this information to the provider. It is helpful to have things written down in advance, so you don’t forget them.
- We recommend you keep a health journal which includes your medications, allergies, medical and surgical history, planning and visit or hospitalization notes.
- We recommend that you enlist the assistance of a helper to go over things with you and go to visits with you to listen and take notes.

All of the information in this packet is available for viewing on our website:

www.jkppa.org

We Can Help Tab: “Patient Tips”

JKPPA: 610 Harper Avenue Jenkintown, PA 19046 215-886-HELP (4357)

Office Visit Prep



10 TIPS BEFORE SEEING THE PROVIDER

1 YOUR AGENDA

This extends beyond listing your symptoms.

- **WHAT--** What do you want to accomplish at the visit? – “I have a headache; make it go away” is a lot different than “I have a headache; reassure me that it is not a brain tumor.”
 - Think in terms of, “I am visiting the provider today because I want the provider to _____.”
 - Perhaps you want the provider to explain why you feel this way, relieve your symptoms, reassure you, etc.
- **WHO--**Who are you making an appointment with and who will be seeing you at your visit? The physician in charge of your care? A physician assistant (PA)? A Nurse practitioner (NP)? They each have different expertise and responsibilities for your care. Think about who you want to schedule your appointment with.

2 YOUR SYMPTOMS

Describe your symptoms:

- **WHEN--** Consider location, how severe, how often, how long, and when you have symptoms – in the morning, late at night, after eating, etc.
- What makes the symptoms worse or better – stress, movement, bowel movements, etc.

3 YOUR HISTORY OF PRESENT ILLNESS: What’s wrong now!

- When did the symptoms start?
- Have the symptoms changed over time?
- What treatments helped and what didn’t?
- Why are you concerned about it now?

4 OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS (past medical history)

- What other conditions have you been diagnosed with?
- Do you take medication for any other conditions?
- What surgeries have you had?
- What is normal for you? Ex. weight, blood pressure, heart rate, blood counts

5 YOUR MEDICATIONS

Always bring a list of medications to the office visit.

- Name of the medication, dose, and reason for taking it.
- When did you start taking the medicine? Did it work for you?
- Did the medicine have any bad effects on you?

Office Visit Prep



6 DRUG ALLERGIES OR INTOLERANCES (bothers you)

- They are not the same – an upset stomach (intolerance) differs from itching or wheezing (allergy).
 - Intolerance = bad effects
 - Allergy= body reaction
- What is the effect on you if you take the drug? – It is important to consider the type of effect when deciding with your provider whether to try another similar medicine or a completely different one.

7 YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE

- What are your deductible and out of pocket costs?
- Do you have prescription coverage?
- What is not covered by your insurance?
- Do you need a referral (HMO)?
- This may influence what testing or medications you can get, so it's important to discuss these things with your provider

8 YOUR RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- What is your support system? Do you have people to help you?
- Bring someone with you to the visit or plan for them to participate in the visit by phone (to listen and take notes).
- Is there someone at home to help you with the care plan after the visit?
- Plan to raise limitations with your provider. *Ex.* If you have to take care of a loved one 24/7 or can't take time off work, you might be unable to attend an elective hospital procedure or go to Physical Therapy 3x/ week. **Brainstorm how to adapt.**

9 PRIORITIES

It is important to know what matters most.

- a conservative or less risky approach or an aggressive, maybe quicker, or more risky approach?
- When choosing a medicine: whether it works well, is safe, or inexpensive?
- If a less effective medicine were safer, would you prefer it?
- Is there a less expensive medicine that will work just as well? Can you get samples or is there a program you can apply for that will reduce your cost?
- Always plan to choose with your provider what is medically best for you.

10 THINK ABOUT YOUR POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

- Are there problems that may limit your ability to have the treatment? – *Ex.* can't attend PT because of transportation issues, can't take shots, financial limitations, etc.

The Office Visit



10 DO'S AND DON'T'S IN THE OFFICE SETTING

1 YOUR ATTITUDE

Your attitude is important.

- Be friendly, courteous, and smile.
- Be nice to all staff members. They are more likely to help you if you are nice to them.

2 DO: PREPARE AN AGENDA-PLAN FOR YOUR VISIT

Write down what you want to get taken care of at the visit.

- Give the reasons for your visit as a request rather than as a symptom – " I am here today because I want to _____.
- State your concerns at the beginning of the visit as clearly and to the point as possible.
- Having your agenda written down will help you to remember everything you want to ask and help you get to your concerns quickly.

DON'T: Wait until the end of a visit to raise an issue.

3 DO: BE CLEAR

- Because time is limited, pick the 2 or 3 most important issues that you want to address.
- Don't give a long list of complaints. If you need a second visit you can schedule it.
- Make sure you tell the provider your concerns even if you have already told them to an assistant.

4 DO: CLARIFY & UNDERSTAND

Ask questions and make sure you understand everything. At the end of the visit state what you understand the plan is to make sure you are right and to ask any more questions.

Ex. "You want me to see a specialist/consultant? Will your office schedule the visit or do I need to do that? You want me to take Metformin and call if I have side effects. Are you giving me a prescription, or will you call it in to my pharmacy? Is that the brand name or will the medication have a different name? (When you fill the prescription, double check it is correct).

Communicate any obstacles or circumstances that may interfere with your treatment

- *Ex.* Can't attend PT because of transportation issues, can't take shots, can't swallow big pills, financial limitations, etc.

The Office Visit



5 DO: KNOW GOALS BEFORE YOU GO

Consider your goals in general, rather than asking for a specific course of action.

- Your goals are to get to the bottom of what really concerns you and receive effective treatment.
- If you are concerned about cancer, it is okay to say so and ok to discuss how your provider is going to make sure you don't have cancer.
- If you are concerned a medication is causing a side effect, discuss other options for the same effective treatment. But remember you may have to live with the side effects. Maybe a generic is just as good as a brand name, but maybe not. Discuss medication options and possible side effects. Which would be best for you? Is a generic version available?
- Your insurance may not allow a specific diagnostic test or treatment. Make sure that the recommendation being offered is what the provider thinks is best, rather than what the insurer wants. ***If not, ask the provider to fight the insurer to provide the care that they feel is most appropriate.*** Write a personal letter of appeal to your insurer using key words such as quality of life

6 DON'T: BE INTIMIDATED

- Providers are there to help you, and doctors and providers are not gods. You wouldn't hesitate to raise an issue for a child or grandchild. Do the same for yourself.
- You are the best advocate for yourself.
- You can be assertive and respectful at the same time.

7 DO: KNOW YOUR PROVIDERS

- Each provider has different qualifications. Depending on the severity of your problem, you may want to ask to see a doctor.
 - Are they a doctor (or resident or fellow doctors in training), nurse practitioner, physician assistant (PA), medical assistant, medical student?
 - Are they an ophthalmologist (a medical eye doctor) or an optometrist?
 - Are they a nurse (RN or LPN)? RN's have training in patient advocacy.

8 DO: UNDERSTAND THE TREATMENT PLAN

It's important that you know at the conclusion of your visit what the next steps are

- Make sure you understand the reasons for and against a proposed test or treatment and the potential risks and benefits.
- Make sure you understand alternatives to the proposed course of action— the pros and cons of each option.
- Is there an endpoint to treatment?
- How will success or failure be determined?
- Understand why your provider is making a recommendation and how it will benefit you.

The Office Visit



9 DO: FOLLOW UP

- Make sure you know what is expected of you after the visit – testing to be done, medication to be taken, or stopping certain activities.
- When should you follow up, and under what circumstances should you contact the doctor sooner?
- Always follow up for test results and other concerns.
- Do you need to schedule another appointment? with who? Will your provider schedule it for you?
- Do you have an online patient portal and do you know how to use it?
- Use your patient portal appropriately. Do you want to know your test result by looking or do you want to wait to hear it from your provider? When sending messages/asking questions, be brief and to the point of only what is important (See #10 regarding portal functions)

10 DO: UNDERSTAND OFFICE PROCEDURES

- Make sure you understand office procedures and policies– hours of operation, phone calls and missed appointments.
- Make sure you know how to request medication refills.
- Ask support staff/front desk how to access the electronic patient portal and what can be viewed and requested in the system. Which patient portal does the provider use? Can you schedule appointments, view health history and medication list, request medicine refills, submit questions to your provider?
- Find out the best way to communicate with your provider.
- Who are you seeing at your visit, who is making decisions at your visit and who is ultimately responsible for your care? Physician, Physician Assistant, Nurse Practitioner. See 10 Things to Know before you see the Provider in the Office #1 Agenda.

HOSPITAL



10 THINGS TO KNOW IN THE HOSPITAL

1 KNOW WHO IS IN CHARGE OF YOUR CARE

Ask who is your attending physician or attending physician team because the individual could change day to day.

- The attending is the person in charge of your care and is ultimately responsible for your care.
- Your attending may be a private physician, group of physicians or physicians that work for the hospital (hospitalists).
- Attending may bring in consultants or specialists and others to help with your care – other physicians, resident physicians (who are doctors in training and report to the attending), physician assistants, or nurse practitioners.
- You always want to make sure that the attending is aware of your concerns and making the important decisions about your care.

2 WHO IS CURRENTLY TAKING CARE OF YOU

- Make sure you know who is taking care of you in the moment and their role in your care—nurse, nurse practitioner, resident, respiratory therapist, consulting physician, etc.
- Make sure you know who is making the decisions regarding your care, both in general and for specific care.
- Don't be afraid to ask to speak to the person who is responsible for your care and to ask questions.
- *You have the right to be involved in the decisions regarding your care.*

3 UNDERSTAND YOUR DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT PLANS

Make sure you understand the diagnosis and treatment plans:

- What are they?
- Why?
- What to expect both short-term and long-term.
- Once you know your treatment plan, ask when it will happen and follow up to make sure you are receiving the planned treatment, including medications.
- Ask for a complete plan in writing. Review the plan with the provider to make sure you understand it.

HOSPITAL



4 KNOW REALISTIC OUTCOMES TO SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Unrealistic expectations lead to dissatisfaction.

- Discuss your expectations with your provider to help you understand if they are realistic.
- For example: What, if any, limitations will I have? After my surgery, can I expect the pain to go away completely, or will I still have pain but it will be less? Will I eventually be able to get back to my normal activities?

5 KNOW YOUR MEDICATIONS

- Make sure you know what medications you are being given in the hospital.
- Make sure you understand potential side effects and if you have a side effect or reaction, tell the provider what you are feeling.
- Confirm that you are receiving the medicine prescribed and intended for you—the right medicine. You want to make sure that you don't accidentally receive another person's medicine.
- Understand why you are taking the medications.

6 KNOW TIME FRAME

- When will I receive the test results?
- When does the medicine usually start working?
- When will I be able to get out of bed, return to work or drive, etc.?

7 ASK QUESTIONS

- Always ask questions if you do not understand something. This is perhaps the most important thing!
- Always repeat and make sure your understanding is right.

HOSPITAL



8 KNOW YOUR CONCERNS AND RIGHTS

- If you have any concerns about your care ask to speak directly to your attending physician.
- If you have a concern with nursing care, speak directly to your nurse and if you are not satisfied ask to speak to a nursing supervisor.
- You can also ask to speak to the patient representative or advocate in the hospital.
- Try not to be critical; be firm but not demanding; and focus on what will be done for you in the future to make things better for you.
- Ask to see or look on the website for the “Patient Bill of Rights.”

9 UNDERSTAND DISCHARGE PROCEDURE

- Make sure you are very clear on discharge instructions regarding what you need to do, what to expect after discharge and why.
- Discharge instructions may be given by a nurse or social worker.
- Ask for instructions as soon as you learn you are going to be discharged so you can make your own preparations before the time you leave the hospital.
- If your provider tells you early in the day that you will be discharged, but you don’t actually get discharged until later in the day, ask to see your provider again to make sure nothing changed with your condition and it is still safe to be discharged.
- If you are told not to take a medicine that you were taking at home before you went into the hospital, ask why and find out how and when to go back on the medicine.
- If you are to receive home care, make sure you speak to the home care company before you leave the hospital to make sure they will be seeing you at home right away. If they can’t see you right away, make sure that you tell them and the hospital that you don’t feel safe going home unless you can get home care right away.
- See 10 Do’s and Don’ts in the Office Setting, #9 Follow Up for more details.

10 UNDERSTAND HOW TO FOLLOW UP AFTER DISCHARGE

- Make sure you understand what to follow up on, and how to do so —whether it be a phone call, office visit, or visits, when and with whom.
- If you are to follow up in a day or two and the next days are holidays or weekends, ask how you are to receive the care you need over the weekend or holiday.
- Have correct phone numbers and know how you can get answers right away for any serious concerns after your discharge.
- Will my discharge plan and follow up appointments be in my Patient Portal system?
- For more details on office procedures, see #10 from Do’s and Don’ts in the office setting.

SURGERY



10 DO'S AND DON'T'S AND KNOW-NOW'S FOR SURGERY

1 ASK QUESTIONS

- Ask as many questions as you need to make sure you understand everything.

2 CONSENT TO SURGERY

- Surgery is never a risk-free proposition. There needs to be **a formal informed consent process** before every surgery where the physician explains the surgery, including
 - (1) why surgery is being recommended
 - (2) the alternatives to surgery.
- The surgeon should explain:
 - (1) the reasons for and against
 - (2) the pros and cons
 - (3) the risks and benefits of the proposed surgery.

They are not all the same. Make sure you understand all of these issues.
- Consent Form. For the surgery to be performed, you will be required to sign a form saying that the surgery has been explained to you, that you understand everything, and that you agree to the surgery. **Do not sign the form unless all your questions have been answered and you do, in fact, understand everything, you know who is going to be performing your surgery and you do agree to the surgery.** Make sure you read and understand what you are consenting to when you sign the consent form.
- Ask the doctor presenting the consent form to you if they will be involved in your surgery. If not, they may not know the answers to all of your questions and you should ask to speak to someone else who can give you the answers.

3 CONSENT TO ANESTHESIA

- Make sure you understand what will happen with anesthesia. The anesthesiologist, not the surgeon, should explain this to you before surgery.
- You will need to sign a consent to anesthesia. Before signing, make sure you understand:
 - (1) the type of anesthesia you will be receiving
 - (2) if there are any risks involved with this type of anesthesia and if there are less risky options for you
 - (3) who will be giving you the anesthesia and monitoring you during the surgery
 - (4) if you are a senior, if you will receive geriatric anesthesia (to decrease your chances of brain problems from anesthesia)
- Ask questions, decide if the plan sounds right for you and alert them to any potential issues regarding anesthesia, such as previous complications.

SURGERY



4 SECOND OPINIONS OR NOT

- Depending on the nature of the proposed surgery, the physician, and the facility, consider getting a second opinion.
- If you want a second opinion, do not worry about hurting the feelings of the first physician.
- Know how urgent the surgery is. You may not have time to get a second opinion if you need an urgent procedure.
- When scheduling the surgery, make sure you know how urgent it is for you to have the surgery. Push to have it sooner if you can't wait for the next available surgery date. (Ask to speak to a supervisor if you need to).

5 KNOW WHO WILL BE TAKING CARE OF YOU

- Make sure you know who will perform the surgery and who will give the anesthesia. Will it be the attending physician? A doctor in training. Training levels and experience of different doctors may not be the same.
- Understand that the physicians may give over different parts of the surgery to other providers.
 - For example, the surgeon may let a resident physician perform parts of the surgery under their supervision; a nurse anesthetist may be giving and monitoring your anesthesia during the surgery.
 - Make sure that whoever will be doing the surgery and giving the anesthesia are both acceptable to you and tell them you appreciate them and are trusting them to take good care of you.

6 EXPECTATIONS

- Make sure you understand what to expect with surgery, both pre-op and post-op. Some examples:
 - "After the surgery, you can expect to be in the ICU for 2-3 days, and then we will transfer you to a regular room."
 - "You will be on a liquid diet for 2 days and then you will go gradually to solid food."
 - "You can expect to have a lot of pain and swelling in your knee for the first week."
- Make sure you communicate directly with the physician if you have any concerns in the pre-op area or post-op area, e.g. blood pressure very high, oxygen low, blood sugar low.
- Make sure you are stable before surgery and at the time of discharge and speak up if something is different than you expected;
- Always ask questions to make sure you understand everything and follow up with your provider right away if things are not going as expected. If you have an important concern, don't wait because it's a night or weekend or you don't want to bother someone. There should always be someone "on call" to help you.

SURGERY



7 POST-OP INSTRUCTIONS

- READ AND UNDERSTAND the post-op instruction form before signing it. Ask questions about anything that is not clear.
- Follow post-op instructions with regard to activity, diet, wound care, etc. Take medicines exactly as prescribed.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand, including:
- If you are being given the medicine you need to take or if you will have to get a prescription filled by the pharmacy right away (what if the pain starts before I get the pain medicine?)
- Who do I call and what number if I have an urgent concern or problem?
- Do I need someone to stay with me and for how long? How often should they check on me?
- What bad reactions should I watch out for (ex. With these medicines, could I have a problem breathing?)
- When will my home health equipment arrive and what do I do before it arrives?
- If you are going to get home health care make sure they are coming right away and there is a plan for your care if they can't come right away.

8 RESTRICTIONS AND LIMITATIONS AFTER SURGERY

- Make sure you understand your restrictions and limitations after surgery regarding driving, activity, eating, lifting, return to work, etc.
- Make sure you have written instructions about your limitations and the time frame for when the limitations will change.
- If you don't feel that you have made enough progress, be sure to discuss your concerns with your provider before you resume normal activities.

9 FOLLOW UP

- Know when, where and with whom your follow up appointment is scheduled or if you have to schedule it.
- Know under what circumstances you should contact the physician sooner than the follow-up appointment and what is the best way to get in contact.
- Keep your follow-up appointments.

10 ATTITUDE AND APPRECIATION

- If you are pleased with your care and results, let the people taking care of you know. Kind words are always welcome and may prompt them to go out of their way for you.
- If you are not pleased with any important aspects of your care, respectfully communicate in what ways things were not as expected.
- If it could be an ongoing issue, ask how things could be made easier or better for you and **will the person you are speaking with please make a note about it in your record.**
- Always thank people for their assistance.