
3 Ways to Prepare

for Your Next Doctor's Appointment



3 WAYS TO PREPARE FOR YOUR NEXT DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT



By Dr. Lan Ly, Family Medicine Provider

We get the question, “**What should I bring to my doctor’s appointment?**” all the time. The answer isn’t always what you should bring, but rather, how you should prepare. The next time you see your primary care provider or a specialist, think about these three things:

Know what type of appointment you are scheduled for

To the patient, it might seem that going to the doctor is just a doctor’s appointment. But to physicians, **there are different questions, different examinations and different allotments of time that accompany each appointment type**. The appointment types are based on the reason you provide when scheduling your appointment.

For instance, if you schedule an appointment for your annual physical, your primary care physician will check your vitals, complete preventive screenings and do an overall assessment of your health.

Your PCP will be looking at your total health picture instead of a small group of pixels in the picture.

However, for an acute illness, such as cold or flu symptoms, your physician will focus on those symptoms – those pixels – when they started, how long they have lasted and whether others around you have experienced similar symptoms.

The same goes for a chronic disease appointment (diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.) – we’ll zero in on the issue and how to manage it.

“Knowing what type of appointment you have scheduled and what you want to discuss with me is important to achieving your health goals.”

– Dr. Lan Ly

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It's difficult to cover all types of medical concerns in a single appointment. We encourage you to schedule separate appointments with your primary care provider when you have separate medical concerns. This way, your provider can adequately have time to evaluate the issue at hand and provide appropriate care and education.

We also recommend scheduling your appointments as the concerns arise – **never feel like you have to wait until your next regularly scheduled appointment or physical to address a new medical concern.**

Do your 'homework'

For primary care or specialty care, a follow-up appointment generally means your physician wants to see how you're doing after a certain interval of time. This could be because of a change in medication, a lab, an imaging result, or due to chronic disease management, such as hypertension or diabetes.

Your physician may assign you "homework" that she then expects you to turn in at a follow-up appointment. If you have hypertension, you may be asked to record your blood pressure twice a day until your follow up. If you have migraines, you may be asked to log your migraine frequencies and triggers. These medical logs can provide more insight to your condition than checking it once a week or once a month at the doctor's office.



Bringing your "homework" to your follow-up appointment is critical to the care you receive. Your physician will be looking for trends or triggers that affect your condition and your overall well-being.

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If you are seeing your primary care physician or an urgent care provider for an acute illness, such as the cold or flu, take notes about when the symptoms started, where you could have been exposed, and whether symptoms have improved or worsened since onset. All of this recent illness history can be helpful in making an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

Review medications

The No. 1 thing you can bring to a doctor's appointment is your medications or a list of your medications with current dosages, including prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements. Your list should also include any medication allergies you have experienced.

You should be asked about the accuracy of your medication list at every doctor's appointment.

If your physician prescribes a new medication or adjusts a dosage, it's important she has accurate information about your current meds to avoid interactions or negative side effects. It is also helpful when you list the specialist providing that medication, whether it's your family doctor or a specialist, such as a cardiologist or neurologist.

So the next time you have an appointment, consider the question "what should I bring to my doctor's appointment?" The above suggestions would not only help your provider but will also make your visit efficient and goal-directed.

If you have questions about your appointment type and how you should prepare for the appointment, please call your physician's office.