

## Questions to Ask your Doctor Class

Presented by Salus University Occupational Therapy Institute

### How to talk with and ask questions to your doctor?

When talking with your doctor, it is important to speak up for yourself regarding your concerns and quality of care:

#### Suggested Tips:

- Ask for an interpreter ahead of time if there is a known language barrier
- Ask for alternative words/phrases if your doctor is using medical terminology that you are not familiar with
  - Ask questions for clarity when you are not familiar with the meaning of a word
- Ask for pictures/drawings/models to better visualize what your doctor is explaining about your condition
- Ask for instructions/information to be given slower/repeated
  - Especially, if prefer to write down the information yourself
- Ask for a printed summary of your visit at the end
- Find a different healthcare provider who is willing to listen and answer your questions if you don't feel comfortable

### Tips to a Successful Doctor's Visit: Before, During & After

#### 3 Simple Steps to Remember

1. Before Your Visit: **Be Prepared**
2. During Your Visit: **Use Time Efficiently**
3. After Your Visit: **Review & Organize**

#### Before Your Doctor's Visit

#### Make scheduling an appointment easier:

- Asking your healthcare provider if they have a patient portal
- Creating account on the computer or via phone/tablets apps
- Check your portal
  - Access your test results
  - Request prescription refills
  - Communicate with your doctor
  - Manage your appointments
    - Setting up alerts for reminders of appt time
    - Schedule your next appointment
    - View details of your past and upcoming appointments
  - Manage your account (update your phone/address, update insurance, view your statement, pay your bill)



**Checklist: To do the night before your doctor's visit**

- Put out comfortable clothes you don't mind getting dirty at the doctor's
- Schedule travel time in your calendar so you can get to the appointment on time regardless of traffic/unforeseen delays
  - If taking public transit: plan bus, train, etc. route
- Have the doctor's contact information written down in case of a delay/last minute cancellation
- Reflect on your questions and update any questions you have
- Write a To-Do list for your appointment
- Do some research
  - Use trusted websites like [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov), [nih.gov](http://nih.gov) or [mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org) to find general information about your known conditions
  - For specific questions about conditions trusted foundation websites like the MS Foundation, Parkinson's Disease Foundation or Arthritis Foundation may also be helpful
  - Avoid symptom checkers and other sources with questionable information
  - Notes:

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**Checklist: To bring to your doctor's visit**

- A form of ID to verify your identity & your insurance card
- A pen or pencil
- Notebook/paper to write on
- Bring your symptom tracker
- Food diary information
- Information on medication, vitamins, supplements, insurance card, medical history, etc.
- Folder with all medication pamphlets, names and phone numbers of the doctors you see, and medical history
- A family member or friend (if applicable)
- Eyeglasses (if applicable)
- Hearing aids (if applicable)
- Other items: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other items: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other items: \_\_\_\_\_
- List of questions/concerns you would like to discuss with your doctor**

- Questions:

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### **Helpful Suggestions on Organizing Questions:**

- Write your questions down as they come to you
  - Leave a sheet of paper on the fridge in your home or a running list in a “Google Keep” on your phone
- Separating questions into main categories to make sure you hit all your talking points
  - Generalized information about the condition or management
    - What does this mean for me?
    - What is this condition?
  - Questions about next steps: future medical tests, stages/progression of conditions, how to manage the condition
    - Will they call me? Or do I need to call?
    - Do I need to change my diet or exercise routine?
    - What are the steps in diagnosing or managing this condition?
  - Cost/Insurance of treatment
  - Specific Concerns
    - Questions about secondary conditions and their impact on new medications, supplements, treatments or tests
  - Affect on your lifestyle, independence or function
    - Do I have to stop eating certain foods?
    - Will the medications affect my ability to participate in social gatherings?
    - Is it okay to drink alcohol?
  - Other specialist recommendations
    - Who should I follow up with?
    - Do you have any specialists you recommend?
  - Other Options

### **During Your Doctor’s Visit**

#### **Communicate effectively by asking your doctor questions:**

- You don’t want your doctor to make assumptions about your thoughts or feelings
- Your doctor does not know what you’re concerned about, only you do
  - **Be direct**, tell your doctor you have a list of things you want to discuss
  - Bring up family history, especially if it concerns you
  - Remind the doctor of other specialists you see, especially if they are in a different hospital system, or a private office
- If you don’t ask questions, they may assume you already know the answer or that you don’t want more information. They may also assume that it is not important to you.
  - Don’t wait for the doctor to raise a specific question or subject; they may not know it’s important to you.
  - If you start to feel overwhelmed ask “What does that mean?”
- To doctors diagnosing can sometimes be like a guessing a game so they need the knowledge you share about yourself to assist them in making informed decisions on your individualized care

- Confirm with your doctor if test results, medication information, etc. can be accessed through your patient portal
- Use the portal when you have several questions that can't wait
  - Especially if questions relate to an upcoming procedure or test
- Arrive early, you might need to fill in forms before meeting with your doctor
  - Arrive 15 to 20 minutes early for your appointment
- **Take Notes**
  - Record any diagnosis your doctor gives you
  - Record the name and phone number of any other doctor that you should see about your medical problem
  - Take notes on what the doctor tells you and ask questions if you do not understand a medical term, the reason for the doctor's recommendations, or the instructions for taking medication
  - Give your doctor "The run down"
    - Even if you think you understand- repeat the steps, instructions or important points discussed during your visit to ensure you and your doctor are on the same page
- **Medication Management**
  - If your doctor prescribes medicine for you, learn what those new pills do and how you should use them
  - Remember that your Pharmacist may also be able to over this information with you and help you determine a schedule
  - **Tip:** If you need assistance with medication management reach out to us on [OTI@salus.edu](mailto:OTI@salus.edu) or call us at (215)276-3646 to schedule a screening today!

### **Communicate Openly and Honestly:**

- **Be fully honest in your answers**
  - You should not feel embarrassed or ashamed to talk about anything with your doctor
  - Leaving out details or lying to your doctor can be bad for your health because it affects your care, so tell your doctor everything
- **Allowing your doctor adequate time to answer questions**
  - You want your doctor to give time to answer your questions properly. Let them know if it is a question you are willing them to call you or email you the next day with an more thought out response
- **Listening to your doctor when they are speaking to you**
  - Being sure to ask questions for clarity
  - Asking your doctor to speak slower, louder or to repeat anything you missed
- **Before you leave**
  - Ask your doctor for handouts or brochures that you and your family members can review at home
- **If you become overwhelmed during your visit**
  - Simply tell your doctor you don't understand, do not know what to do, or do not know what this means

- This will tell your doctor that you may need more guidance

### **After your doctor's visit**

#### **Review**

- Review any material your doctor gave you and/or the notes you took
  - If you cannot understand something, write down a list of questions before calling the office to speak to your doctor
- Follow your doctor's instructions and keep them informed
  - Follow up with your doctor on test results, adverse reactions to medication, or any complications or worsening of your condition
- Use your patient portal to access information or communication with your doctor

#### **Organize**

- Record the date and time for any scheduled blood tests, x-rays, or other medical tests ordered by your doctor
  - Include the test, testing facility name, and phone number
- Record the date and time of your next doctor's visit

#### **Organize: Dietary Tips**

- Use a symptom tracker or food diary to help get a jump on your MD's recommendations or to reflect on symptoms before your visit
  - These suggested apps are designed to make tracking symptoms and food intake simple, they are all available for free on iPhone and Android



**MyNetDiary:** Calorie counter and food diary



**MyPlate Calorie Counter:** Track your food and log your workouts



**Flaredown:** Track and monitor symptoms, medications, and conditions

- Put all medication handouts, general handouts, and test results in a folder so it's easy to find and bring to your next doctor's visit
  - **Tip:** Use an accordion folder to categorize your material for easier access in the future!

#### **Organize: Medication Tips**

- Use Pill Organizers
  - Morning, Noon, Night
  - Great reminders to take the right medication at the right time, and helps avoid medication mix-ups
- Put all medications, vitamins, and supplements in one location
  - Make sure medication is stored properly
- Keychain or Necklace pill holder
  - To keep with you on the go

- Set up a medication reminder and tracking system using a smart home device or phone
- Regularly check your portal
  - Access your test results
  - Request prescription refills
  - Communicate with your doctor
  - Manage your appointments
    - Setting up alerts for reminders of appt time
    - Schedule your next appointment
    - View details of your past and upcoming appointments
  - Manage your account (update your phone/address, update insurance, view your statement, pay your bill)
  - **Tip:** Put your portal username and password information into your folder for easier access in the future!
- Call your doctor immediately if you are having any problems with your treatment.
- Call your doctor or pharmacist if you think you are having troubling side effects with any medicine prescribed or recommended for you

**For more information about getting ready to visit the doctor:**

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services:** [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov) or [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

**MedlinePlus National Library of Medicine:** [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

**Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality:** [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

## Common Questions Related to the COVID-19 Vaccine

### Questions Categories:

- How do vaccines work?
- What are the types of vaccines available?
- How do I know when I qualify to receive the vaccine?
- Specific concerns about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine

### How do vaccines work?

#### ❖ **Specifically the Covid-19 vaccine?**

- *mRNA vaccines contain material from the virus that causes Covid-19 that gives our cells instructions for how to make a harmless protein that is unique to the virus.*
- *After our cells make copies of the protein, they destroy the genetic material from the vaccine.*
- *Our bodies recognize that the protein should not be there and build T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes that will remember how to fight the virus that causes Covid-19 if we are infected in the future*

#### ❖ **Can the vaccine give me Covid-19?**

- *No, none of the authorized and recommended Covid-19 vaccines or Covid-19 vaccines currently in development in the United States contain the live virus that causes Covid-19*
- *A Covid-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with Covid-19.*

#### ❖ **How long will my immunity to Covid-19 last after getting vaccinated? Will this be a yearly vaccination process?**

- *We don't know how long protection lasts for those who are vaccinated. What we do know is that Covid-19 has caused very serious illness and death for a lot of people*

#### ❖ **Will the vaccine hurt or make me sick? What side effects should I anticipate with the vaccine?**

- *After Covid-19 vaccination, you may have some side effects. These are normal signs that your body is building protection. The side effects from Covid-19 vaccination, such as chills or tiredness, may affect your ability to do daily activities, and they should go away in a few days*

#### ❖ **Where can I find more reliable information on Covid-19 and vaccines?**

- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/)*

#### ❖ **What are the benefits of getting the Covid-19 vaccine?**

- *All Covid-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be highly effective at preventing Covid-19.*
- *Experts believe that getting a Covid-19 vaccine may also help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get Covid-19*

### What are the types of vaccines available?

- ❖ **What COVID-19 vaccines have been approved and how do they work?**

- *Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is 95% effective in preventing the COVID-19 virus with symptoms. This vaccine is for people age 16 and older. It requires two injections given 21 days apart. The second dose can be given up to six weeks after the first dose, if needed.*
- *Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is 94% effective in preventing the COVID-19 virus with symptoms. This vaccine is for people age 18 and older. It requires two injections given 28 days apart. The second dose can be given up to six weeks after the first dose, if needed.*
- *Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. In clinical trials, this vaccine was 66% effective in preventing the COVID-19 virus with symptoms — as of 14 days after vaccination. The vaccine also was 85% effective at preventing severe disease with the COVID-19 virus — at least 28 days after vaccination. This vaccine is for people age 18 and older. It requires one injection.*
- ❖ **Does it make a difference which vaccine I receive? Where can I find more information?**
  - *In general, no, unless you have had a prior allergic or other reaction to a vaccine in the past. In this instance it is best to talk to your doctor or pharmacist to determine if one vaccine is more beneficial for your specific situation.*
  - *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/)*
- ❖ **How many doses will I have to receive? Does the dosing affect the quality of the vaccine? What happens if the second vaccine in the series is delayed?**
  - *With both Covid-19 mRNA vaccines, you will need 2 shots to get the most protection. The timing between your first and second shot depends on which vaccine you received.*
  - *Pfizer-BioNTech doses should be given 3 weeks (21 days) apart*
  - *Moderna doses should be given 1 month (28 days) apart*
  - *Your second dose may be given up to 6 weeks (42 days) after the first dose, if necessary*
- ❖ **How does the Johnson & Johnson vaccine work?**
  - *Many vaccines use a weakened or inactivated form of the target pathogen to trigger an immune response. Viral vector vaccines use a different virus as a vector instead, which delivers important instructions (in the form of a gene) to our cells.*
  - *For Covid-19 vaccines, a modified virus delivers a gene that instructs our cells to make a SARS-CoV-2 antigen called the spike protein. This antigen triggers production of antibodies and a resulting immune response.*
  - *The virus used in a viral vector vaccine poses no threat of causing illness in humans because it has been modified or, in some cases, because the type of virus used as the vector cannot cause disease in humans*
    - **How is it different from the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines?**
      - *The J&J vaccine uses a different approach to instruct human cells to make the SARS-2 spike protein, which then triggers an immune response. It is what's known as a viral vectored vaccine*

- *This is the same approach to make an Ebola vaccine that has been authorized for use by the European Medicines Agency*

➤ **How effective is the vaccine?**

- *It is 66.3% effective in clinical trials (efficacy) at preventing laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 illness in people who had no evidence of prior infection 2 weeks after receiving the vaccine.*
- *People had the most protection 2 weeks after getting vaccinated*

**How do I know when I qualify to receive the vaccine?**

❖ **When, where, and how can I get the Covid-19 vaccine?**

- *When: Currently, we are in Phase 1A of Pennsylvania's vaccine rollout. Your eligibility will determine what phase you are in and when you can register for the Covid-19 vaccine*
- *Where: There is a running list of places that are currently or will be offering the Covid-19 vaccine Walgreens, CVS, Rite Aid, and other select pharmacies; Hospitals; Clinics; Doctors' offices; Health departments; and Assisted living facilities*
- *How: If you are eligible for the Covid-19 vaccine, you can register for the vaccine online through websites and patient portals through specific health networks*
- **Who will be administering the vaccine to me?**
  - *It depends on the vaccination site*

❖ **Do I have to pay for the vaccine? Do I need health insurance?**

- *The federal government is providing the vaccine free of charge to all people living in the United States*

**Specific concerns about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine**

❖ **What are the long-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines?**

- *The FDA and CDC are continuing to monitor safety to make sure long-term side effects are identified.*
- *Because COVID-19 vaccines clinical trials only started in the summer of 2020, it's not yet clear if these vaccines will have long-term side effects. However, vaccines rarely cause long-term side effects.*

❖ **Is it safe to get a Covid-19 vaccine if I have an underlying medical condition?**

- *It is important that you ask specific questions related to your medical history to your doctor. However, in most instances, people with underlying medical conditions can receive the FDA-authorized Covid-19 vaccines as long as they have not had an immediate or severe allergic reaction to a Covid-19 vaccine or to any of the ingredients in the vaccine.*
- *Vaccination is an important consideration for adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions because they are at increased risk for severe illness from Covid-19.*

❖ **I already had Covid-19. Should I get the vaccine? Should I wait to get it?**

- *Yes, you should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had Covid-19*
- *Experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from Covid-19*

- *If you were treated for Covid-19 with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, you should wait 90 days before getting a Covid-19 vaccine.*
- ❖ **Can my children be vaccinated?**
  - *The Pfizer mRNA vaccine is authorized for people 16 and older*
  - *Moderna mRNA vaccine is authorized for people 18 and older*
  - *Johnson & Johnson vaccine is authorized for people 18 and older*
- ❖ **Is it safe to get the vaccine while pregnant or breastfeeding/nursing?**
  - *Your pregnancy and or medical history will determine the overall safety, however, there is currently no evidence that antibodies formed from Covid-19 vaccination cause any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. In addition, there is no evidence suggesting that fertility problems are a side effect of ANY vaccine. People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the Covid-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them. If you have any concerns, consult with your OBGYN.*
- ❖ **What are my chances of having a severe allergic reaction?**
  - *Monitoring by the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System detected 21 cases of anaphylaxis after administration of a reported 1,893,360 first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine*
  - *11.1 cases per million doses and 71% of these occurred within 15 minutes of vaccination*
- ❖ **Is double masking more effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19?**
  - *Wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask offers more protection against the coronavirus, as does tying knots on the ear loops of surgical masks*

**For more information on COVID-19 visit:**

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/)

**Mayo Clinic:** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/>

**PA Department of Health:** <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/>