

Questions to ask your GP



If you have a health concern your first step is visiting your GP. They'll do the necessary checks and if needed, refer you to a specialist. Asking the right questions at the beginning may help you have a better understanding of your condition, treatment, and even costs involved. Your doctor is there to help you with anything you're unsure about, so be open and honest. Here are a few questions that you can ask:

Understand your health concern

- What's the name of your condition?
- Are there any other names it's known by?
- How serious is this condition?
- What causes it? How long is it likely to last?
- Can you pass it on to other people?
- What's the prognosis/outcome like?
- Is it likely to get worse? Or is it likely to get better?
- Do you require treatment? If so, what type?
- Do you need to see any other health professionals, such as specialists, physiotherapists, dietitians or dentists?
- Is there anything you can do to improve your condition?

Feel comfortable with your proposed tests

- What's the test for, and how is it conducted?
- What are the benefits of having the test?
- Are there any risks involved in having the test?
- Are there any alternative tests?
- How accurate are the results of the test?
- What will the results mean?
- Will you need further testing?
- Do you need to prepare for the test (i.e. fasting beforehand)?
- How much will the test cost? Can it be bulk billed?
- Is it covered by Medicare or your concession card?
- How soon do you need to have the test done?
- How do you book in to have the test?
- When and how will you get the results?
- Who will discuss the results with you: should you call for the results, or will your GP call you?

Know your treatment options

- Do you really need this treatment?
- How effective is this treatment?
- What's the evidence for this treatment?
- Are there any risks or side effects of the treatment?
- Are there other ways to treat the condition?
- How long will you need the treatment for?
- What will happen if you don't have the treatment?
- When should you start treatment?
- How much will the treatment cost?
- Will the cost be covered by Medicare, your concession card or by private health insurance?
- Will you have to pay a gap for the treatment?

Getting a referral for a specialist

- Ask for more than one recommendation.
- Understand why the GP recommended that particular specialist and what the clinical basis is.
- Do they know what the specialist charges and if they charge a gap?
- Ask if they would use this specialist themselves.
- If affordability is a genuine issue, ask your GP to note this to the specialist in their referral.
- If you prefer to do your own research, you can always ask your GP for an unnamed or a specialist practice referral.
- Let your GP know that you have private health insurance with Health Partners and you prefer a specialist that uses the Health Partners Access Gap Scheme.
- Find out what hospital(s) the specialist practises at in case you can have a choice that is convenient to you.
- Discuss how you might obtain a second opinion if you're not happy.
- Ask if you can access your test results if a second opinion might be required (to avoid more tests).

Extra hints and tips

- ✓ If you're unsure of anything or worried you'll forget, ask your doctor to write it down.
- ✓ Ask for reputable websites/apps/printed pamphlets where you can research your condition, treatment and options.
- ✓ Ask if there are support groups for people with this condition and how would you contact them.
- ✓ Take a list of your current medications.
- ✓ If you think you'll need extra discussion time with your doctor, ask for a long consultation.

For more useful information search 'going to hospital' at healthpartners.com.au

About referrals

If your doctor doesn't have sound knowledge of specialists in a particular field, they may be open to providing an 'unnamed referral' which doesn't specify a specialist's name.

The Department of Human Services states that "referrals don't need to be made out to a certain specialist or consultant physician".

They state that a valid referral only needs the following:

- Relevant clinical information about the patient's condition for investigation, opinion, treatment and/or management.
- The date of the referral.
- The signature of the referring practitioner.

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