FACTSHEET

Making the Most of Your Appointment



Prepare for your visit

Book a longer visit if you need to. It is a good idea to book a long visit if you have more than one thing to talk about, or it is the first time seeing this doctor.

You should get a long appointment for:

- Yearly health checks for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people or people with intellectual disability.
- Making a mental health care plan
- Making a chronic condition management plan

These may be bulk-billed (you don't pay anything) – ask the service before you book.

Make a list of questions to ask your doctor and choose the most important. This will help you get more out of the time with your doctor and help you to remember everything you want to ask. Get some ideas at: www.healthdirect.gov.au/questions-to-ask-your-doctor

Take a summary of your medical information, such as:

- Contacts of other doctors/health providers
- Current health conditions
- Past health conditions and operations
- Medicines
- Allergies
- Family history of major illnesses
- Blood test and imaging results
- Advance Care Plan

Take a support person with you - they can help you remember what is said and help you with any hard news. Ask them to help you take notes.

Listen and share information about:

- Any new symptoms (signs of illness) – what and how long
- What medicines you take, including prescription, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbal medicines.
- If there are any problems with your medicines or treatments
- Your needs and values, like:
    - access needs – e.g. sensory issues or limited mobility
    - your lifestyle – e.g. you must drive for work so can't take certain medicines
    - cultural or religious practices – e.g. you need medicines to be halal
- If you need support to follow a treatment plan

Ask questions

Ask the health worker if you don't understand. Ask them to explain it another way or use a diagram, picture or video. Follow your list of questions and make sure to ask:

- What is my main health problem?
- What do I need to do next?
- Why is it important that I do this?

Use **Check Back** to make sure you understand (adapted from checkback.org):



Note down what you need to do

Write down the main points or ask if you can record them using voice notes. Make a list of what you need to do, such as:

- Book another appointment
- Get a test or scan – check if you need to go to a specific place and if you need an appointment to get the results.
- Start, stop or change a medicine
- Who to contact if you have more questions

If they send you to a specialist or other health service, ask for a copy of your **referral letter**. It is a good idea to call or email the specialist to check they have got it.

After your appointment…

Support yourself with any difficult emotions that may come up. Try the R.A.I.N. mindfulness technique (more at psychology.com/tools/rain-technique)

Recognise what you are feeling → **A**llow it to just be as it is → **I**nvestigate your feelings with curiosity → **N**urture yourself with kindness

Get any tests or scans and check with your doctor if you need an appointment to talk about test results. You can get most test and scan reports after 7 days by logging into My Health Record or in the 1800MEDICARE app.

Track any changes in your health, if you have a new illness or start a treatment. Write down what you are feeling and when it happened. You could also write down things that trigger your condition, like foods, weather or activities.

Speak to your pharmacist about any changes to your medicines. They can help you make sure you are taking them correctly.

Templates and Apps

Scan for the digital factsheet and templates:

- Download **HCCA's free templates** for your medical summary, notes, medicines list and symptom tracking at hcca.org.au/publication_categories/templates/
- **The Council of Intellectual Disabilities' My Health Matters Folder** is an Easy Read book that helps people to build a good medical history and communicate with their doctors. Download at cid.org.au/resource/my-health-matters-folder/
- **The Spectrum Intersections Self Advocacy In Health Care Toolkit** is designed for and by LGBTQIA+ Autistic People to help them manage their health information and communicate with health professionals. Download at inclusionmelbourne.org.au/project/self-advocacy-in-healthcare/
- Try a symptom tracking app like **Bearable** (bearable.app) or **Flaredown** (flaredown.com).
- Ask your pharmacy if they have an app you can use to manage your scripts and set reminders. They may need to give you a code to activate the app.
- Use the Australian Government **1800MEDICARE app** to see medical history in My Health Record, store your e-scripts and see test and scan results. Learn more at www.digitalhealth.gov.au/1800MEDICAREapp

Learn more…

Watch some tips on getting the most from an appointment from HCCA Members: https://youtu.be/6sF9JCLapIc

Listen to the Health Literacy Out Loud Podcast: When Patients Create Their Own Medical Binders: A Powerful Way to Get Organized and Feel More in Control): http://traffic.libsyn.com/healthliteracy/OsborneGaglio.mp3

Read these helpful articles:

- Some tips from a doctor: www.webmd.com/men/features/tips-for-a-successful-doctor-visit#3
- An example of how to write your own medical history: chronicillnesstraumastudies.com/patient-medical-history-new-doctor-appointments/
- About writing a family medical history: www.healthdirect.gov.au/family-medical-history

Updated November 2026. This resource provides general information that is accurate at the time of publication. It is not professional medical or legal advice.