

HEALTH

Making the most of your doctor visits — Part I

The weather is changing, the flu is back in many conversations and for a lot of us, doctor's visits will be in our future. The following ideas may help you to get more from your next visit to the doctor.

Before Your Appointment

You can make sure you get the best possible care by being an active member of your health care team. Being involved means being prepared and asking questions. Asking questions about your diagnoses, treatments, and medicines can improve the quality, safety, and effectiveness of your health care. Taking steps before your medical appointments will



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help you to make the most of your time with your doctor and health care team.

Since time is limited during doctor visits, you will want to prepare for your appointment by thinking about what you want to do during your next visit. Do you want to

talk about a health problem, perhaps get or change a medicine, schedule medical tests or discuss surgery or treatment options? Whatever the case you'll need to write down your questions to bring to your appointment. The answers can help you make better decisions, get diligent care, and feel better about your health care.

During Your Appointment

To get the most from your visit, tell the nurse or person at the front desk that you have questions for your doctor. If your doctor does not ask you if you have questions, ask your doctor when the best time would be to ask them.

Asking questions is important but so is making sure you

hear—and understand—the answers you get. Take notes. Or bring someone to your appointment to help you understand and remember what you heard. If you don't understand or are confused, ask your doctor to explain the answer again.

The questions you may want to ask will depend on whether your doctor gives you a diagnosis; recommends a treatment, medical test, or surgery; or gives you a prescription for medicine. Questions may include: what is my diagnosis, what are my treatment options, what are the benefits of each option, what are the side effects, will I need a test and if so what is the

test for, what will the results tell me, what will the medicine you are prescribing do, how do I take it, are there any side effects? If surgery is recommended, you may want to ask: why do I need surgery, are there other ways to treat my condition or how often do you perform this surgery? Another good question is: do I need to change my daily routine?

Find out what you are to do next. Ask for written instructions, brochures, videos, or Web sites that may help you learn more.

Locally, Community Health Center of Northeast Oklahoma, Inc., dba Afton Grove and Welch Community Health Centers continue to

serve the area with the finest in personalized health care. For details or to schedule an appointment contact (918) 257-8029, (918) 801-7504 or (918) 788-3918 or check us out on the web at www.chcneo.com, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter. A sliding payment scale is available for patients based on family size and income.

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PIXABAY / TERO VESALAINEN

Put health above battling with the scale, experts say

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In theory, losing weight sounds simple: calories in, calories out.

But not everybody sees the same results or the same rate of weight loss. And that can lead to frustration and surrender.

"You have to create a caloric deficit to lose weight, but there are a lot of things that play into that," said Liz Weinandy, a registered dietitian at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. "It's not as simple as it sounds."

More than one-third of adults in the United States are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But only about 1 in 6 Americans who have been overweight or obese are able to successfully lose weight and maintain it, according to a study by Penn State University.

"Think about health first. If we think about eating healthily, then it doesn't become a battle with the scale," Weinandy said. "It's really about changing that mindset. It's really about the end goal, which should be better health."

Weight loss can seem to happen slowly, but results are attainable through persistence and attention to overall health, she said.

"Every once in a while, I get somebody who comes to me and everything they tell me is perfect," including what they're eating and how they're exercising, Weinandy said. "And things just won't budge."

The first variable she

checks: exercise habits.

Cardio workouts are effective at increasing metabolism and burning calories during workouts, said Dr. Jacqueline McGowan, a Mount Carmel sports medicine physician in Lewis Center. Walking, jogging, biking, swimming and jumping rope are good activities to get results on the scale.

The American Heart Association recommends a minimum 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week to improve cardiovascular health in adults.

Other types of exercise, such as weight training, also help the body burn calories, but with delayed results, McGowan said. The trick is to find a healthy combination of strength and cardio.

But for some, weight loss still can stagnate, even when the body keeps moving. One problem might be muscle memory.

Mixing up workout routines and running routes or terrains can stimulate weight loss by forcing the body to utilize different muscles, essentially tricking it from falling back onto movements committed to memory, McGowan said.

Along with exercise, eating habits play a large role in losing and keeping off weight, Weinandy said. Eating a breakfast with protein, and getting moderate protein throughout the day, is important.

Drastic reductions in caloric intake also can be unhealthy. "Whatever people do needs to be reasonable, so that it is sustainable," Weinandy said.

Improving literacy to improve health

Everyday we're inundated with health information from an ever-increasing variety of sources. Medical science and technologies progress rapidly, and what we learned about health or biology during school years can quickly become outdated or incomplete. Even persons with advanced literacy skills, can become overwhelmed by all the data. The bottom line is that many Americans find it a challenge to understand health information, filter good information from bad, and make appropriate health decisions — in essence, to become health literate. According to the American Medical Association, poor health literacy is a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income or race.

Health literacy is defined as, "the ability to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment."

When those abilities are diminished, health can suffer, costing not only the individual but communities as well. For example, more than half of patients reading at a sixth-grade level or less report they go to the Emergency Department when they have an asthma attack compared with less than a third of literate patients. The estimated cost of low health literacy in the U.S. is between \$50, to \$73 billion per year.

Numerous studies show that people with limited health literacy skills are more likely to:

- Not take preventive measures such as getting mammograms, Pap smears, and flu shots.
- Enter the healthcare system when they are sicker.
- Have chronic conditions and are less able to manage them effectively.
- Make greater use of services designed to treat complications of disease and less use of services designed to prevent complications.

Currently, prevention is the foundation of many public health systems. Yet prevention cannot be addressed if a patient does not understand what is being said to them. Health literacy was once viewed as a patient's deficit, or a patient's lack of knowledge and skills regarding health issues. Today, health literacy is viewed as a "systems issue" — one that reflects the complexity of giving and understanding health information, and navigation of the health care system.

For instance, imagine yourself as an immigrant who's become ill in the workplace, or an elderly widow newly diagnosed with diabetes. Next imagine hearing words like "pneumoconiosis" (disease of the lungs caused by inhaling mineral/metallic dust over time) or "insulin" (natural body hormone that can be supplemented, and regulates the level of glucose/sugar in the blood).



SEAN BRIDGES

The words, their definitions, and how they affect you, are likely to be unfamiliar. If a patient does not understand the implications of their diagnosis, and the importance of prevention and treatment plans, increased costs and diminished health care can occur. The same is true if the treating physician does not listen to and fully understand the patient or the cultural context which the patient receives critical information.

Because patients are often faced with complex information and treatment decisions, many skills are needed to navigate the current healthcare system including the ability to:

- Find health information and services.
- Communicate needs and preferences.
- Evaluate information for credibility and quality.
- Understand choices, consequences and context of the information and services.

Patients need not only communication and technological skills, but numeric ones as well. Choosing between health plans or comparing prescription drug coverage requires calculation of premiums, copays, and deductibles. Calculating cholesterol and blood sugar levels, measuring medications, and understanding nutrition labels, also require math skills.

There is a well-documented

link between education, poverty, and health outcomes. Currently, 43 percent of Oklahomans have below basic literacy skills, and are unable to perform more than simple, everyday literacy activities. Compound that fact with Oklahoma's high poverty rate and the significance of health literacy for its future becomes apparent.

Increasing our state's health literacy requires a collaborative effort. We all have a part to play in improving health literacy. With the proper delivery of information — true communication, we can foster a culture that improves the health of individuals and all communities.

For more information on health literacy, visit <http://health.gov/communication/literacy>.

Sean Bridges is Health Educator for the Delaware and Ottawa County Health Departments.

KEEPING FAMILIES HEALTHY



Lauren Mitchell, D.O.
Board-certified
Family Medicine

Growing up in Mustang, Okla., Dr. Mitchell knew from an early age she wanted to practice medicine. She was drawn to family medicine because she wanted the opportunity to develop closer, long-term relationships with her patients.

"I enjoy working with families. From newborns to geriatrics, each patient has unique needs. Whether I am educating them on how to live a healthier lifestyle, or helping them through a sudden illness, disease or injury, I am there for my patients every step of the way. It is very fulfilling to provide care through the various stages of their lives," said Dr. Mitchell.

Dr. Mitchell earned her medical degree at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tulsa, Okla. She completed her family medicine residency at the Durant Family Medicine Residency program.

She accepts Medicare, Medicaid and most insurance. Her office is located in the INTEGRIS Doctors Office Center at 310 Second Ave. SW, Suite 102, in Miami. Call 918-540-7814 today to schedule an appointment.

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