

Patient Tear-Out

Optimizing Your Office Visit

An important part of managing your health is to make the most of every visit to your neurologist. We all know how busy doctors are, and sometimes patients feel reluctant to take up too much of their time by mentioning problems or asking questions. This puts the doctor at a disadvantage, because the information you provide is crucial in determining the best type of treatment for your condition. It's also common for patients to have difficulty remembering everything their doctor said during the visit. Here are some tips to optimize your office visit to make it as productive as possible for both you and your doctor.

Come Prepared

- **Locate forms and papers to bring to your appointment**

Before your appointment, gather together forms and papers related to your illness and its treatment.

These items should include documents concerning your medical history, as well as laboratory reports and the names of medications you've taken in the past. If you've had neuroimaging studies, the imaging center may have given you films or a CD showing the results. Be sure to bring these to the neurologist, too. Also, don't forget your insurance information (even if you think the doctor's office already has it on file), any referrals that might be required, and any paperwork (such as disability forms) that might require the neurologist's signature.



- **Make lists for the neurologist**

During discussions with the neurologist, it's not unusual for patients to forget to mention all the problems they've been experiencing or to encounter difficulties when trying to remember the details of all the medications they're taking. That's why it's a good idea to make lists before you go to your appointment.

Begin by jotting down any medical problems or symptom fluctuations that have been

occurring. This list should be prioritized so the first item describes your "chief complaint"—that is, the main reason for your visit. Identifying the chief complaint will help the neurologist prioritize your care. As an illustration, if a treatment for problem #3 on your list is going to make problem #1 worse, your neurologist will want to design an appropriate strategy to avoid this pitfall.

Next, list all the medications you're currently taking, including the doses and how often you take each medicine each day. Be sure to include any side effects you've noticed, even if you're not sure they're related to the medication. Provide as much information as possible, and let your neurologist sort it out.

You might also want to make a list of how you're functioning on a daily basis and what your quality of life is like. Such descriptions can often give the neurologist additional insights into the effectiveness of your treatment or the impact of side effects.

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- ***Make notes of questions to ask the neurologist***

Have you ever been on your way home from a doctor's appointment when you suddenly remembered that you forgot to ask a question that's been on your mind? That happens to all of us from time to time. To help both you and your neurologist have the most productive office visit, make a list of questions to bring to the appointment. Also, bring paper and a pen so you can take notes as the neurologist addresses your concerns.

Bring Someone With You

- Sometimes the people close to us can provide the neurologist with additional perspectives that hold clues as to how well treatment is working or what type of therapy might be preferable going forward. That's why it's helpful to bring a family member or caregiver with you to every office visit.
- These individuals can provide the neurologist with information from an observer's point of view. They may also be able to fill in missing

details if you can't remember some aspect of your symptoms or treatment.

Follow Up When Necessary

- If, despite making lists, you realize after the visit that you forgot to ask a vital question or tell the neurologist something important, don't delay picking up the phone and calling the office. Explain the reason for your call to the staff member who answers the phone, and your message will

be passed on to the neurologist. In turn, the neurologist or someone on the staff call you back. If you wish to let the neurologist know something that was omitted in the visit, such as the name of a forgotten medicine, it is fine to mail or fax this information to the office.

- Patients are sometimes hesitant to make calls or mail information like this because they don't want to "bother" the doctor. Don't let these feelings dissuade you from calling; your neurologist needs to know what's going on with your medical condition so you can get the maximum benefit from your treatment.

