

How To Be An “Activated Patient”

Dr. Michael E. Makover

Modern health care has advanced technologically, but economic pressures have severely shortened the time doctors get to spend face-to-face with patients. Neither doctors nor patients like this very much. In our **JIB Medical Department**, however, we try to allow more time and we are always looking to improve in this area.

Today, much of disease is preventable, but doctors too often have too little time to do anything but deal with the immediate problem. They have limited time to listen to you and to explain things fully.

Here are some suggestions about how to make the system work better for you – which some have called being an “Activated Patient:”

- ▶ Plan ahead by writing down everything you want to cover and questions to ask. Many people get tongue-tied or nervous in a doctor’s office, especially when they feel rushed.
- ▶ Keep your appointment and be on time.
- ▶ Think about your priorities and what you want to cover in order of importance. You can group these into three categories:
 - 1 Things that must be covered with your doctor to your satisfaction *before* you leave the office.
 - 2 Items that are important but could wait for another appointment; mention them to the doctor so both of you can plan when to come back.
 - 3 Things you would like to ask but it wouldn’t be terrible if you didn’t get to them.

Remember: There are no silly questions – if it is important to you, it deserves an answer. You are not expected to be a medical expert.

- ▶ Tell the doctor everything you want to cover at the beginning of your visit. That’s why you want to plan ahead and make notes on what your doctor needs to know. For example: How did your symptoms start and when? What you have done about it? Have you taken any over-the-counter drugs or supplements, etc? Be brief and to the point since you will want to use your limited time as efficiently as possible.

- ▶ Think about what you want the doctor to do for you. A clear message enables your doctor to better meet your needs.
- ▶ Many people often realize that they didn’t fully understand everything *after* they leave the office. So, before you leave, ask the doctor to let you review, in your own words, what you understood from the visit. Your doctor can then help correct anything you’re unsure of or didn’t understand completely. And, you can ask him/her to give you a brief written explanation or reminder.

In our JIB Medical Department, your doctor will give you a written summary of your visit.

If you feel your doctor is not meeting your needs, or is not treating you with the openness you’d like, give him/her a chance by discussing it first. Of course, if you are not satisfied, you should seek another doctor.

Being an “Activated Patient” is helping your doctor help you!

