



AASPIRE

# Healthcare Toolkit

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## Healthcare: After the Visit

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# Healthcare: After the Visit

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## 1 What is this topic about?

This topic is about things that may need to be done after a visit with a healthcare provider. These things might include:

- Contacting your healthcare provider if you have questions after the visit
- Making a follow-up appointment with your healthcare provider
- Making an appointment with a different healthcare provider or a specialist (a referral)
- Getting a lab, x-ray, or other test
- Filling a prescription, getting or taking a medication
- Tracking your symptoms
- Taking care of your health condition(s) at home

The [After the Visit Worksheet](#) has spaces to organize information about these things.

## **2 What might I do if I have questions after the visit is over?**

You might think of questions for your healthcare provider after the visit is over. For example, you might need more information about something that was talked about during the visit. Or you might realize you don't have good instructions for how to do something at home to manage your health. If you have questions that come up after your visit, you can contact someone to get your questions answered. Before you leave the clinic or office on the day of your visit, ask your healthcare provider or the front desk staff who you can contact if you have questions after you get home. Ask how to contact the person. If you are given a contact method that does not work for you (for example, they give you a phone number and you do not use the telephone), ask if there is a different way, and tell them what methods might work better for you. It doesn't matter how long after the appointment you realize you have more questions. What matters is that you get the information and care that you need. Contact your provider's office and tell them that you have some questions about your last visit.

## **3 What might I do if the provider asked for a follow-up visit?**

It is always a good idea to know when your health care provider wants you to come back to see him or her. Often your provider will tell you this information, but you may want to ask if he or she does not tell you first. Follow-up appointments are often made to see if a medication is helping, to see if a problem has gotten better or worse, or to tend to an injury. If a follow-up appointment is needed, make sure you know this information:

- When should I make the follow-up appointment for?
- How do I make a follow-up appointment?

- Is there anything special I should do before the follow-up appointment or bring to the follow-up appointment?

You might be able to schedule the follow-up appointment with the clinic or office staff before you leave the clinic or office.

#### **4 What might I do if the provider made a referral to another provider or specialist?**

Your healthcare provider might ask you to make an appointment with a different healthcare provider, or with a specialist or a specialty department. Healthcare providers make referrals when your health problem needs the care of someone who specializes in that kind of problem. For example, a healthcare provider might refer you to a dermatologist for an unusual rash. If you were given a referral to another provider, clinic, or department, you may need to make an appointment with the person or department you were referred to or this may be arranged for you. Check whose job it is to schedule the new appointment—yours or theirs. The office staff can tell you. Good information to know is:

- What is the name of the person, clinic, or department I'm supposed to see?
- Why have I been referred to this other provider?
- Do I call them or do they call me?
- Who do I contact to make the appointment?
- How do I make the appointment?
- How quickly do I need to be seen by this other provider?
- When should I expect to hear back from this other provider?

- What should I do if I don't hear back from this other provider, or if they cannot see me in time?
- Should I bring anything special with me when I go to this other provider?

If the referral is to someone in the same clinic or facility as your healthcare provider, you might be able to make the referral appointment with the front desk staff before you leave the office. Make sure the provider you have been referred to knows about any accommodation needs that you have. You might also want to ask your healthcare provider to talk to the specialist or department about your needs.

## **5 What might I do if the provider ordered lab tests?**

Your provider may order labs, X-rays, or other tests. Some examples of labs and tests are blood draws, urine samples, or ultrasounds. Some tests might be done the same day as your healthcare appointment and not need any special scheduling. Other tests you might need to schedule later, or with another person or department. It will depend on the test and the reason for the test. If your healthcare provider has ordered labs, X-rays, or other tests, and they are not going to be done right away before you leave the office, make sure you know the information below. Note that not all of these questions might apply to the test or procedure you need.

- What is the name of the test or procedure?
- Where do I go to have the test or procedure done?
- Do I need to do the test or procedure at a special time or day? If so, when?
- Do I just show up for the test or procedure, or do I have to schedule an appointment?

- Who do I schedule the appointment with, and how do I do it?
- Are there special instructions? Example: do not eat anything for 12 hours before the test (this is called fasting).
- What will the test or procedure be like? Will there be strange sounds or sensations? Will it hurt?
- How will I find out the results of the test?

If you have insurance, you may also want to ask whether or not your insurance will cover the test or procedure. You may need to get this information from your insurance provider. If the lab, x-ray, or test will be done in the same clinic or facility as your healthcare provider, you might be able to make the appointment with the front desk staff before you leave the office. Make sure the people doing the labs, x-rays, or tests know about any accommodation needs that you have. You might also want to ask your healthcare provider to talk to the specialist or department about your needs. Ask your healthcare provider for help preparing for labs or tests, if you need it.

## **6 What might I do if the provider prescribed medications?**

Your healthcare provider might ask you to take a medication or use a medicinal cream or patch. The medication could be prescription only, or it might be something you can buy in stores without a prescription (sometimes called "over the counter" medicine). For any kind of medication, make sure you feel comfortable with how to use it before you leave the office. You should try to answer all of the following questions:

- What is the name of the medication?
- How many pills or how much liquid do I take at a time? If it's a cream, how much do I put on at a time? If it is a patch, where do I put it on my skin?

- How many times a day do I take or use the medicine?
- What time or times of day should I take or use the medicine?
- Does it matter if I take the medicine immediately before or after eating?
- Do I take or use the medicine only when I have a symptom or do I take it regularly on a schedule?
- When do I stop taking or using the medicine?
- What side effects should I look out for?
- What do I do if there are side effects?
- Are there risks of interactions (bad reactions) with sunlight, my other medicines, or foods I may eat?
- Should I avoid any particular activities while I'm taking this medication?
- Do I need to refrigerate the medication, or store it in a special way?

If the provider prescribed medications, you will also need to know about the prescription, and about refills. It is a good idea to know the name, address, and phone number of your preferred pharmacy, if you have one. You may want to give that information to your provider. Some things to know before you leave the office are:

- Has the prescription been faxed / e-prescribed / called in to the pharmacy, or do I need a paper copy of the prescription?
- If the prescription has been faxed, e-prescribed, or called in, where is the pharmacy?
- If I am getting a paper copy of the prescription, is there a particular pharmacy I need to take this to, or can I take it to any pharmacy?
- How do I get refills, if I need them?

When you pick up your medication at the pharmacy you can have a short conversation with the pharmacist about the medication. You may want to ask these questions again, or any other questions about the medication:

- Are there any special warnings about this medication?
- What are the side effects?
- What do I do if I experience side effects?

It can also be good to tell the pharmacist what the instructions are for taking or using the medication, in your own words. The pharmacist can help to make sure you have the right instructions. When you start taking a medication, you may want to think about how you might remember to take it at the right times. Here are some ways that people remind themselves:

- Set a daily alarm clock or cell phone alarm
- Use a pill box that has days of the week compartments to remind you
- Put your medicine in a place where you are likely to see it
- Mark your calendar or daily journal when you have taken it
- Make yourself a reminder sign and place it somewhere you are likely to see it
- Ask someone to help remind you

## **7 What might I do if the provider asked me to track things, like my symptoms?**

Your healthcare provider might ask you to track your symptoms. For example, you might be asked to keep a pain diary, a mood diary, or note when your symptoms become better or worse. Symptom tracking is usually used to



monitor the progress of a condition, to better understand a condition, or to see if a medication or treatment is working. There are a lot of different options for symptom tracking. You might need to try more than one way, or even invent your own way, in order to find a symptom tracking system that works for you. Here are some ideas:

- Use a paper calendar or day planner
- Use a paper diary
- Use a symptom tracker online. Examples:
  - Symptom tracker at the [Mayo Clinic](#)
  - Symptom tracker at [WebMD.com](#)
- Use a symptom tracker program on your computer (search the Internet for "symptom tracker software")
- Use a symptom tracker app on your smart phone, tablet, or PDA (search your device's app store for "symptom tracker")
- Use an audio or video diary (for example, with a voice recorder, with the recorder and camera on a smart phone or computer)

For many of these kinds of trackers, symptoms can be noted in words (for example "mild" or "severe") or they can be noted with pictures (for example, a smiley face or a sad face). Remembering to keep track of symptoms can be hard for a lot of people. Here are some ideas for how to remember to use a symptom tracker:

- Set a timer or alarm to go off when it's time to use the symptom tracker.
- Pick a time of day when you are usually not busy, and always track your symptoms at that same time of day (for example, after dinner, before you brush your teeth, or at noon).
- Ask a friend, a family member, or someone you live with to help remind you.

- If you keep a daily planner, a visual schedule, reminder notes, or a daily to-do list, add working on your symptom tracker to it.

## **8 What might I need to know about taking care of my health condition(s) at home?**

Your healthcare provider may ask you to do things at home to manage your health condition or conditions. For example, you may be asked to keep a pain diary, to eat a special diet, or to use some kind of medical equipment like a crutch or a splint. Before you leave the office, make sure you have instructions that you understand for what to do at home. The instructions might be given to you by a nurse or someone else in the office or clinic who is not your primary healthcare provider. It can be helpful to do a "teach back" with the person who gives you the instructions. In a "teach back," first someone explains or shows you how to do something. Then you explain or show them how to do that same thing, in your own words. Teaching often helps people to learn.

## **9 If I need assistance to do these types of things, what might I do?**

Your provider's office may be able to help you with some of the things you need to do after the visit. Ask the nurse, care manager or the front desk staff if they can help you. Not all offices will be able to help you with these things, but it is always worth asking. Some things your provider's office may be able to help you with are:

**Scheduling Appointments** - If your follow-up, referral, test, or pharmacy pickup is in the same office, clinic, or medical facility as your healthcare provider, they probably can schedule the appointment for you. You can also ask if the office has an online appointment tool or other ways to make setting up appointments easier. Some providers' offices will call you and remind you

when it's time to set up a follow-up or other appointment. Each office has different tools and policies, so ask what is available for help with scheduling appointments.

**Reminders** - Ask the office staff if they do reminder calls or emails. If they do, ask them about any accommodations you might need regarding reminders for your appointment. Some offices or clinics may have people who can help with reminders to pick up a medication from the pharmacy.

**Social Services** - Some providers work with social workers or can help you network with other social services like vocational rehabilitation, food stamps, housing or other health and human services. If you have basic needs that are not getting met in your daily life, talk about that with your healthcare provider. They may have some resources or ideas.

**Transportation** - Ask your healthcare provider's office if they can help you connect with transportation options through your regional transportation system or volunteer driver programs.

**Directions** - Your provider's office may have information sheets that offer directions to get to places you'll need to go for referrals or tests. If the office or clinic is large enough, like a clinic that is part of a major hospital, it may also have a map of the whole facility. Someone from the office may also be able to help guide you to a place you need to go in the building, like the X-ray or radiology department.

## **10 My provider often seems rushed at the end of visits, how might I get all my questions answered?**

There are a lot of questions to be answered about follow-up care like labs, medications, or at-home care. Sometimes providers may run out of time at the end of a visit and need to go see other patients. If it seems like the provider is in a rush or if the provider is ending your visit without answering all

your questions, make it clear you still have more questions. Find out what the best way would be to get your questions answered. For example, you might say:

*"I know you don't have much time now, but I still have some important questions about my follow-up plans. What would be the best way for me to get them answered? Is there someone in your office who could help me or is there a way I can be in touch with you later? Thanks."*

## **11 Summary and Tips**

If you have questions after your visit, it is OK to contact your healthcare provider and ask them. Before you leave the medical office, get information for who to contact if you have questions, and how to contact them. Things your healthcare provider might ask you to do after your visit are:

- Make a follow-up appointment to see how things are going
- Go see another healthcare provider or specialist
- Have a lab, x-ray, or other test done
- Take or use a medication
- Keep track of your symptoms
- Do something at home to take care of your health condition

Try to get all of the information you need about any of these things you've been asked to do before you leave the office. Make sure you understand any instructions for taking medication, preparing for labs, or doing things at home. If you think you will need help doing any of the things you have been asked to do, talk to your healthcare provider or to the nurse about it. Your healthcare provider's office may be able to help in other ways besides medical care.

Ask your provider's office if they can help you with directions, transportation, reminders, social services, or making appointments. If your provider seems too rushed at the end of a visit to answer your questions properly, ask them what the best way will be for you to get them answered later. The [After the Visit Worksheet](#) has spaces to organize information about these things.