

Dr. Debra's Healthcare Follow-Up Checklist

Suggestions for your follow-up visit:

A. Bring a support person with you at best; a notebook at least. If the potential results are serious, bring that support person and have your person take notes on everything discussed. You will undoubtedly have questions after the appointment because you won't hear it all under stress. Our brains are wired to shut down under stress, so it is normal to miss things. You might forget a substantial part of what was talked about. This is why your support person and their notes are so important.

B. Bring a list of questions for your doctor. Below is a suggested list of questions. Some or all may be relevant to your situation. Bring a list with you because, as noted above, it is very likely you will forget some key questions. Ideally, you want to leave this appointment with as many of your questions answered so you are not left feeling confused and still in the dark, something I often hear from people after such appointments.

Questions for a follow-up doctor visit:

1. What did the test(s) show?

2. What is the diagnosis? Get the name of the disease or finding. This gives you a handle for further learning about your condition.

3. What does that mean?

- Is it malignant (that is, cancer) or not. How does it behave? Is it very aggressive (Might I die fast?) or is it slow growing?
- Is it a structural abnormality like a torn meniscus? Keep reading.
- Hepatitis? What type? Blocked artery? COPD? Depression? The list goes on...

4. Is there a known cause? In some diseases, a cause is known. In many others, not. If known, is there anything I can do to remedy the underlying cause, now and going forward? For instance, you have high blood pressure. Is there something you can do in addition to taking medication? Will it make a difference if I eat less salt, exercise, lose weight?

5. How will this disease or defect affect me and the length and quality of my life?

6. What do you recommend I/we do about this? Your doctor is your partner here.

7. What do you recommend for treatment? Both for the disease itself AND its effects (which could be anything from anemia to pain, fatigue and nausea etc.). Doctors can be very disease-oriented and forget about the symptoms. This is particularly true for cancer when the doctor (in this case, an oncologist) focuses primarily on the cancer treatment, and delegates, or worse, neglects the symptom management (for instance, to a palliative care specialist). Just get clear who is your 'go to' for help when needed.

8. What should I expect to happen (known as prognosis) if I treat or not?

9. What are my treatment options? What do you recommend for me? What would you recommend to your mother who is in my age and state of health?

10. What are the effects of treatment both on the course of this disease and side effects?

11. What exactly are the side effects and how long will they last? How severe or mild will they be?

12. Are there any treatment interactions with my current medications and conditions?

13. Will the treatment be curative? If so, what are my chances of cure and what will it take to get there?

14. If not, will treatment slow down the course of the disease? If so, what does that mean? Will I live longer and with what quality of life? How much longer? Days, months, years?

15. Will treatment buy me time and if so much? And at what cost (particularly in quality of life and side effects)? Financial cost may be a consideration as well and if it is, ask.

16. When should we start? How will that go and who will give both give me all the details and be available for me to reach out to at any time I need?

17. How often will I see you for follow-up visits? Will you be available when I need guidance or hit a road-block?

Thank your doctor for answering all your questions.