

The Doctor's Visit of Your Dreams!

Whoever said that patience is a virtue was probably sitting in a doctor's office. Between the endless waits and shorter-than-ever appointments — to say nothing of the wallet-busting bills that follow — it can take the fortitude of a saint



1. Before Your Visit

- **Rehearse.** Despite their best intentions, once confronted by the "white coat," many people get tongue-tied, especially when it comes to intimate, and sometimes embarrassing, health questions. Combat last-minute reticence with a preappointment rehearsal, says Davis Liu, M.D., author of *Stay Healthy, Live Longer, Spend Wisely*. You can circumvent self-consciousness (needless though it may be in your doctor's opinion; he has pretty much heard it all!) simply by knowing you've chosen phrasing that's precise, and that you're comfortable with.
- **Mind your meds.** If you're taking medication prescribed by doctors other than the one you're presently visiting, make a list of all of it (including dosages) and bring the list to your appointment, suggests Michael Banks, M.D., co-founder of thedoctorschannel.com. And remember: Supplements count as medication, too. "People are often reluctant to reveal which supplements they're taking, concerned their doctor will disapprove," says Hyla Cass, M.D., author of *Supplement Your Prescription*. Some of these products can interact as harmfully

with certain drugs as other prescription or over-the-counter meds can.

2. During Your Exam

- **Get to your point.** Studies have shown that super-busy doctors typically cut patients off within 23 seconds, says Dr. Liu, so stay focused and cite your concerns up front. "Make a list of no more than four health problems, and start with the most important," he suggests.
- **Make "memories."** A Mayo Clinic study recently found that patients remember less than half of what physicians tell them during visits, Dr. Liu notes. While it's not a good idea to spend all your appointment time scribbling in a notebook, it may be helpful to write down your diagnosis as well as the recommended treatment and read it back to your doctor for confirmation.
- **Speak up.** Medical jargon can be confusing, so if you're stumped by your doctor's words, say so. The fact is, you're paying for a service, part of which includes having your questions answered to your satisfaction, says Art Schoenstadt, M.D., founder of emedtv.com

3. After You Leave

- **Report back.** If your doctor has put you on a new drug, don't hesitate to mention unusual side effects, says Dr. Cass. "Everyone is different biochemically, so we all react differently. I tell my patients, 'no side effects are too small to contact me about.'" (According to a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, 1.7 million emergency room visits a year are due to adverse reactions to prescription drugs.)
- **Finish your prescription.** Many patients stop taking prescriptions once they start feeling better — but there's a reason you to take, say, antibiotics for a full 10 days, explains Dr. Cass. The drug you've been given needs to attack an illness during all of its various phases. If you don't empty your prescription bottle, you may well be inviting problems to return.

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