

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

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If a woman feels anxious or overwhelmed at her healthcare appointment, she may not describe her symptoms clearly or ask questions. This can result in delays in diagnosing problems like heart disease.

Symptoms associated with a heart attack and heart disease are varied and women, in particular, may not experience the typical symptoms. That's why the words you choose to describe symptoms are so important. They give clues to assist your practitioner in making the correct diagnosis from the start.

Take the time to organize yourself before your doctor visits. This can help reduce at least some of your anxiety. Know how the healthcare system works and how to activate it and never be afraid to ask questions. Effective communication with your practitioner is an essential part of your health.

1. Prepare for your visits. Write down a list of all your concerns and give it to your practitioner at the beginning of each appointment. List your most important concerns first.
2. Be Clear, Objective and Persistent when talking about symptoms.

Clearly state the purpose of your visit. Be specific.

SAY: "I'm here to see you today because, for the past two weeks, I've been having intermittent burning in the center of my chest. I've also been having palpitations which make me feel anxious. I just don't feel right. Could it be my heart?"

DON'T SAY: "I think I've been having panic attacks. I've been under a lot of stress lately."

Objectively describe your symptoms.

SAY: "I've been getting winded going up the steps. I've never had a problem climbing stairs before.

DON'T SAY: "I don't have any energy. I must be depressed."

Persist in finding a practitioner who will listen to you. Make sure she/he understands you.

SAY: "I'm not comfortable simply taking a medication to calm my nerves. Please refer me to a cardiologist who understands the needs of women. I must have further testing to ease my mind."

DON'T STOP: Continue to seek care if you have a problem that needs a diagnosis, even if your practitioner fails to find anything wrong or says it's just your nerves. If you feel you are not getting the care you deserve, you can obtain a second opinion, or you can change doctors.

3. Be honest about your health habits, and be willing to make changes. Tell your health care professional if you don't exercise regularly, eat all the wrong foods, drink too much caffeine or smoke cigarettes (*exposure to second-hand smoke is a risk too!*).
4. Let all of your doctors know about every medicine you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs, birth control pills, vitamins, herbals and other supplements.
5. Record the doctor's instructions. You can take notes or bring a tape recorder. Ask for an interpreter if English is not your primary language. It may help to bring along a friend who can write down the doctor's instructions for you. Ask questions. Make sure you understand the plan of care so that you can work together to improve your health.

Accepting responsibility for your own welfare, being pro-active and taking steps to improve communication with your doctor will result in better healthcare for you!

HEALTHY HEARTS PROGRAM

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