

Things to consider before you start your search...

- ❑ Do you feel more comfortable with a male or female practitioner?
- ❑ Does the practitioner need to speak your language of origin, or understand your culture?
- ❑ Do they need to know about your particular health matter?
- ❑ How far are you willing to travel?
- ❑ What are the convenient times of day for you for an appointment?
- ❑ Do you want to be able to see your practitioner on the weekends?
- ❑ Do they make house-calls?
- ❑ What hospital do they work with? Which hospital do you want to go?
- ❑ Do you want to be able to bring your partner, family member, or support person to your visits?

What to expect from a health care practitioner

They should :

- ∞ Listen to you
- ∞ Explain medical terms that you understand
- ∞ Treat you with respect
- ∞ Accept your lifestyle
- ∞ Not make assumptions about your life
- ∞ Pay attention to what is happening in your life
- ∞ Accept your use of alternative or traditional treatment
- ∞ Keep anything you tell them private and confidential
- ∞ Return phone calls in a reasonable time-frame

What should I expect from a physical exam?

They must :

- Touch you in a gentle and professional manner
- Ask you if what they are doing hurts or is uncomfortable
- Explain what they are doing
- If the practitioner is a male, he must be willing to provide you with the name of a female doctor to perform the examination
- If it is a male, he should ask you if you would like a nurse, in the room during an examination. They must be willing to do this if you ask.

Sample questions to ask about your diagnosis

If your doctor tells you what he/she thinks your problem is, here are some things that you can ask to clarify your situation. This will help you get information to help make informed decisions for yourself.

DIAGNOSIS

- ☞ What do I have?
- ☞ What causes it?
- ☞ How did I get it?
- ☞ What is the usual course of it?
- ☞ What happens next?
- ☞ Do I get sicker or better?
- ☞ Can I give it to anyone else?
- ☞ Could I have something other than that?
- ☞ Can you refer me to someone for a second opinion?

TREATMENT

- ☞ What treatment do you suggest?
- ☞ How does that treatment work?
- ☞ How long will I have to take it?
- ☞ What are the side-effects?
- ☞ Are there other treatments? If so, how can I find out more about these options?
- ☞ Is there anything I can try that does not involve pills or surgery?
- ☞ What would happen if I do not treat it?
- ☞ If the treatment does not work, what is the next step?
- ☞ Where can I get more information/support?

Visit to the Doctor's Office:

When it's your first visit to a new doctor, you may be asked to fill out a form describing your medical history, the health of your family members, and what your life is like (eg. how busy you are, what kind of work you do, if you smoke, what kind of medicines you take, etc.). Sometimes you're asked to fill out this form in the waiting area before you see the doctor. Other times, your doctor may also ask you this information when you go into her/his office.

The doctor may take your pulse (on your wrist, neck, or under your left breast) and check your blood pressure cuff.

She may also use a stethoscope to listen to your breathing. You may be asked to lift your shirt so the doctor can listen to your breathing through your chest and back.

She may shine a light into your ears, eyes and throat.

She may check your reflexes as well. Usually this is done by tapping your knees lightly with a small mallet.

You have the right to request that a family member, friend, or nurse be present with you at any time you are in the doctor's office.

The doctor may ask you to change into an examination gown. The doctor should leave the room so you can change into it. The opening of the gown should be on your back.

After you have changed into the gown, the doctor will come back into the examination room to continue the check-up. This may include completing a breast exam where she will feel each of your breasts for any lumps or irregularities. A pelvic exam may also be completed. This will include a pap test, an external examination of your genitals, and an examination of your ovaries, uterus, and cervix. The doctor should explain what a pap test is and what it is for.

The doctor may also check your skin for any irregular moles or skin spots. She may check your stomach and intestinal area by pressing gently against your abdominal area.

The doctor may request a blood, urine or stool sample. Blood and urine samples are sometimes collected in the doctor's office, other times in a medical lab. Stool samples are collected at home and you're then asked to drop them off at the medical lab for analysis. It will take a few days for the doctor to receive the results of these tests.

Sometimes the doctor may prescribe medications for you to take. If you have any questions, don't feel afraid to ask.

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We have rights in the health care system. But sometimes we are intimidated into making sure our rights are respected. Often, we are unsure what our rights are.

You have the right to

- ask questions about your health and illness
- good explanations you can understand
- say no to, or refuse treatment
- ask for further information and resources about your health
- go to another practitioner for a second opinion
- confidentiality and privacy
- have access to your medical records, and read them
- have your medical records transferred to another health care practitioner
- decide the future of your health
- seek 'alternative' therapies and medications
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Doctor's Rights

Full Disclosure: If you are hiding information (certain family or medical history, prescriptions, allergies, addictions, specific symptoms) it's unfair to expect an accurate diagnosis. Give the doctor as much information about your health as you can.

Example: What if your doctor prescribes a drug that you are allergic too, (one that conflicts with your other medication).

Common Courtesy: Treat your doctor with respect. If you make an appointment, show up. If you need to cancel, give reasonable notice.

Advanced Planning: Think carefully of your symptoms, write them down so you can be as accurate as possible when talking with the doctor.

Questions: If you don't understand something ask. Ask for simpler explanations if needed. If you don't ask, you can't blame the doctor for not providing you with enough information.

Follow advice & follow through: Take medications as directed and follow advice. If you're experiencing side effects to medication or have a problem with his/her advice, let the doctor know.

Enough time to make a diagnosis: Diagnoses don't happen overnight. Allow the doctor enough time to examine you and run the necessary tests. This might mean that you need to wait longer for an appointment so that your doctor can schedule enough time to fully examine you.

Room for disagreement: What you think is in your best interests may not be what your doctor thinks is best. Allow for a difference of opinion and give your doctor a chance to explain his/her side.

Professional conduct: Don't request unusual favors that compromise your doctor's moral beliefs, and don't ask your doctor to do something illegal. (eg. false letters to employers etc. about your health)

Refuse treatments: Doctor's have the right to refuse to perform any procedure or treatment if this is not considered in the patient's best interests. In this case you can ask for a second opinion.

Keep records: Doctor's have the right to keep personal and confidential notes on their patients.

End relationship with patient: Doctor's have the right to discontinue a therapeutic relationship with any patient and request that you seek care elsewhere especially if any of

his/her rights are abused. In a case that this happens there are certain steps the doctor must take, such as either talking to the patient him/herself explaining why he/she wants to end the doctor/ patient relationship, or a letter explaining why. The doctor must continue treating the patient until the patient finds alternative health care. If the doctor does not follow these steps, she/he can have civil liability or have disciplinary actions brought upon him/her for abandonment.