

Time to Talk...

*Get the most
out of your
doctor's visits*



www.healthliteracy.ie

 **MSD**
Be well

Have you ever left your doctor's surgery without:

- Getting answers to all your questions?
- Knowing the details of your problem?
- Understanding your treatment plan?
- Meeting your goals for the visit?

If you answered **"yes"** to any of these questions, **you are not alone**. Some people leave their doctor's surgery feeling like they want more information. Results of a nationwide survey carried out by MSD in 2007 found that 1 in 5 Irish people are not fully confident that they understand all the information they receive from their doctor.

One way to help you take care of your health is to build a good relationship with your doctor and other members of your healthcare team.

'Time to Talk... health literacy' is a programme that may help you make the most of your visit to your doctor. It might help you to take more control over your own health.

'Time to Talk... health literacy' will help you to:

- talk about your concerns
- ask questions
- get answers that you understand
- know what to do after the visit to take better care of your health

It's easy to get started! Just read this booklet and use the following worksheet to help you. In addition to this booklet you can visit www.healthliteracy.ie to download the tip sheet, "*Building a Strong Relationship With Your Doctor.*"

How to get the most out of your doctor's visits through better communication

Here are five steps to help you get the most out of your doctor's visits. Keep in mind that good communication during your visit may result in better health for you.

- Step 1** Prepare a plan for your visit.
- Step 2** Talk about your health concerns.
- Step 3** Ask questions during your visit to help you understand.
- Step 4** Problem-solve with your doctor.
- Step 5** Before you leave, go over what you have talked about and what you will do.

The following pages provide more detail on these steps.

5 steps for making the most of your doctor's visit

Step 1 Prepare a plan for your visit.

- Set goals for your visit. Think about what you would like to happen during the visit.
- Before you go to the doctor, make a list of your questions and concerns. Put the things that concern you most at the top of the list. This helps to make sure that these concerns get talked about during your visit.
- Remember you need to make the most of your limited time with your doctor.

Step 2 Talk about your health concerns.

- Tell your doctor how you are feeling and about any changes in your health since your last visit. Let the doctor know:
 - when the problems started
 - what symptoms you have
 - how often you have the symptoms

Giving the doctor clear details of your problem makes it easier for them to help you.

Step 3 Ask questions during your visit to help you understand.

- Check with the healthcare professional looking after you to make sure that they understand what you are saying.
- Ask questions about your health problems. For example, ask how to take your medicine and how to make healthy changes in your life. Most importantly let your doctor know if you don't understand something.
- Use your own words to describe what you think your doctor is telling you to do. This helps to make sure that you understand what your doctor is saying. It also helps you to remember what you need to do after you leave the surgery or clinic.

Step 4**Problem-solve with your healthcare professional.**

- Tell your doctor about things in your life, like stress, work or money problems, that make it hard for you to take care of your health. For example, if you hate exercising and don't have the money to join a gym, try problem-solving. Together, you may be able to come up with a different plan to suit you. For example, if you need to get fit, you might get good exercise working in your garden or walking your dog which won't cost you anything and you might enjoy it.
- Write down some of the ideas you and your doctor talk about that may help you make the changes.
- Let your doctor know if you still have concerns and worries before you leave the surgery or clinic.

Step 5**End your visit by going over what you have talked about and what you will do.**

- Repeat in your own words what you understood from your talk with your doctor. Describe what both of you talked about, what you will do after the visit and when you need to come back.
- Let your doctor know that you like having the chance to talk about your concerns and that you appreciate it when they listen. Also, tell your doctor that you want to keep working together so you have more control over managing your health.



Checklist for talking with your doctor

Use this checklist to get ready for your doctor's appointment and make the most of your time with your doctor by:

- Writing down your thoughts and concerns before your visit to the doctor will help you remember what you want to talk about.
- Think about what you want to talk about during your visit. Start with the most important things and end with the least important.

Write your list here:

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- Think about things about yourself and how you live that will be important for you to talk about during your visit. This could be things like your eating and exercise habits, any major stress in your life, using medicine or emotional changes.

Make a list to share with your healthcare professional here:

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- Think about what questions you have.

Make a list of your questions here:

- Think about your health problems and concerns.
Decide what you might try to do to solve them.

Write this information here:

- Think about building a strong partnership with your doctor.
Be sure to end your visit by repeating in your own words what you understood from the conversation. For example, you could say:
"Here's what I understand you think I should do."

Visit www.healthliteracy.ie to learn more about health literacy and how to make the most of your doctor's visits by building a strong and active relationship with your healthcare professional.





Material content is based on the Time to Talk CARDIO educational program developed in partnership with the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation, Canyon Ranch Institute and RIAS Works. www.timetotalkcardio.com