

# Making Your Doctor Visit Count

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**Target Audience:** People with diabetes

**Objectives:** Participants will:

1. Know what issues should be discussed with the health care team at regular medical checkups (including medicine, blood glucose monitor, etc.).
2. Become comfortable asking the doctor and other health professionals questions related to their medical care.
3. Be able to keep self-management records related to their health.

**Time Required:** 30–45 minutes; for a 15-minute lesson, eliminate role-playing

**Equipment:** Overhead projector and screen

**Props:** Paper bag containing different prescription and over-the-counter drugs; sample blood glucose record book used by local doctor's office; sample blood glucose monitor borrowed from participant or pharmacy; small notebook

**Handouts:** [“Your Health Care Partnership”](#); [“Each Visit: Discuss These Major Points With Your Health Care Provider”](#); [“Tests to Expect at Each Visit”](#); [“Discuss at Least Once a Year”](#); [“At Least Once a Year.”](#)

## Lesson Plan

Medical costs are very expensive even if you have good medical insurance. You want to be sure that every medical checkup is complete and meets all your needs. How many of you have gone to see your doctor and then realized you forgot to ask him or her a very important question after you left? (*Have participants raise hands.*)

With some good record keeping and planning, you can make sure that your next doctor visit will be more fruitful. Taking care of your health is not just the job of your health care team. You must also be a health care partner. That means giving good information about your blood glucose levels and reporting any symptoms that may show that your health is changing.

Today we will talk about what should be done during a routine doctor visit and how you can be sure that all your questions are answered. This may sound like a lot of work, but if you want good health, you have to put some effort into it.

Before your medical checkup, gather these items to take with you. (*Distribute [“Your Health Care Partnership”](#) handout and show sample blood glucose record book and blood glucose monitor.*)

**1. All Your Medicines.** (*Show bag containing a variety of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.*) To each doctor visit, carry in a bag or box all your current medicines, including over-the-counter drugs. This is especially important if you see different doctors for different health problems. Sometimes one medication will interact with another and

cause medical problems or make one medicine work less well. When they see your medicines, your health care team will be able to decide if they are the right ones for you or even if you still need them.

**2. Your Blood Glucose Record.** (Show a sample log book [[“Take Charge of Your Diabetes”](#)] used for recording blood glucose records.) If you go to the trouble to test your blood glucose, go the extra step and record the results along with anything like food, illness, or activity that may explain a change in your blood glucose level. Look for a pattern in your blood glucose control that may help you and your health care team improve your diabetes care.

**3. Your Blood Glucose Monitor.** (Show a sample blood glucose monitor.) Even if you have been monitoring for years, have a diabetes educator, doctor, or other health care provider check your technique at least once or twice a year. All of us can get sloppy about how we do things. We get in a hurry, we do it without our glasses, we don’t clean our monitor regularly, etc. Having someone else watch you will ensure that you are doing it right and not missing a vital step. Your health care team can then compare the reading from your monitor to the glucose test done at the doctor’s office to see if it varies too much. If there is a problem, you can decide together how to handle it. (Note: Make sure to use strips that are not past the expiration date.)

**4. Your List of Questions.** (Show a small notebook.) Write down your questions for the doctor and the entire health care team before you go to the checkup. We all get a little flustered when we visit a doctor. Many doctors seem a little rushed, and we worry about taking too much of their time. But most doctors and other health professionals want you to ask questions. Let’s face it, diabetes self-management is tough. There is always something new to learn, and everyone’s diabetes is different.

Keep a small note pad on hand all the time to jot down questions. Then talk to your family or other support people before your checkup for any more questions you haven't listed. During the exam, don't hesitate to tell the doctor you have questions. Write down the doctor's answers and ask for more explanation if you still don't understand something. Bring along a reliable family member or friend to hear the answers so you can discuss how to apply the advice after the visit. This person also can help you remember answers if your memory or notes are a little vague. **Remember, your doctor is getting paid well to see you. Make sure you get your money's worth.**

Your doctor also may ask you to keep other records about your health. These may include a record of your weight or blood pressure, especially if you are trying a new meal plan or medication.

How often you see your doctor depends on your diabetes control and other health issues you may have. (Show overhead entitled [“Have a Medical Checkup Every 3–6 Months.”](#)) Even if you are doing well, have at least a short checkup every 3 to 6 months. These checkups are like having your car’s oil changed every few months. You do it to prevent problems. You would never go 2 to 3 years without having your car checked—your health is a lot more important than your car.

What should you expect at your doctor visit? Let’s look at what should be done at each visit and then on a yearly basis. (Distribute the following handouts: [“Each Visit: Discuss These Major Points With Your Health Care Provider,”](#) [“Tests to Expect at](#)

***Each Visit;*** ***“Discuss At Least Once a Year”;*** and ***“At Least Once a Year”.***) At each visit, your doctor should look at your blood glucose records to discuss any problems with your diabetes control. If you take your records and no one looks at them, you won't want to continue to keep them. So make sure the doctor or someone else on the health care team really looks at them.

The health care team should also explore how your meal plan and activity pattern are working for you. No one stays the same, so recommendations for your eating and activity may change from year to year. You don't wear the same clothes all your life, so why should you eat the same way or stay at the same level of activity as when you were first diagnosed?

At every visit, take time to discuss how you are dealing with diabetes emotionally. Diabetes is a difficult disease that demands a lot from you. Feeling down and burned out about it is not unusual. Your medical team may be able to help you learn new skills to help you cope.

If you are a woman and still able to have children, discuss birth control. Every pregnancy should be planned, especially when you have diabetes. To ensure the health of your baby, your blood glucose level should be as close to normal as possible before exception. Uncontrolled diabetes can harm an unborn child.

The blood glucose check at the doctor's office is just a snapshot of your blood glucose control at that moment. It does not replace home blood glucose monitoring. Likewise, the A1C test cannot show the broad range of blood glucose readings that everyone experiences. The A1C test just gives a general idea of how you have done over the last several weeks. Your blood glucose records, the doctor's office glucose test, and the A1C test all work together to give a more complete picture of your diabetes control.

Your doctor should check your feet at every visit. Many serious foot and leg injuries are missed because nerves may not send pain messages as well as they once did. Always remove your shoes and socks in the exam room so no one will forget to check your feet.

*(Show overhead entitled “**Discuss at Least Once a Year.**”)* At least once a year, assess your emotional adjustment to your diabetes with your health care team. You may even want to visit a mental health professional to learn coping skills to make it easier to deal with diabetes.

The health care team should also review annually your knowledge about handling high and low blood glucose levels, taking care of your teeth and gums, and proper daily foot care.

*(Show overhead entitled “**Tests To Expect at Each Visit.**”)* At every visit, some tests will be done. These include a blood glucose test, an A1C test showing your average blood glucose control over the last 3 months, a blood pressure check, and foot exam. They will also weigh you. If you smoke, you should know this increases your chances of heart disease and lung cancer. Discuss different ways to quit with your doctor.

*(Show overhead entitled “**Tests To Expect at Least Once a Year.**”)* At least once a year, your urine should be tested to see how healthy your kidneys are, and you need a test to check your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. If you are over 35, you may also

need an EKG (electrocardiogram) to be sure your heart is OK. The doctor should also check your circulation and nerves in your feet and legs.

You also need to have your eyes dilated to check for diabetic eye disease (retinopathy). An eye doctor, rather than your regular medical doctor, is the best one to do this.

You also need a flu shot once a year.

The success of your medical checkups depends on your working closely with your health care team. After all, if you don't take good care of yourself, it won't be your health care team who suffers; it will be *you*.

## Activity

Have volunteers from the audience role play the following situations. Give the volunteers the different situation descriptions on small pieces of paper. After the scenes are acted out, have the audience members discuss them and how they would have handled them.

1. An older woman who wants to ask her doctor about the tingling in her feet when he is in a hurry to get out of the examining room.
2. A middle-aged man discussing with a dietitian his need for more food on his meal plan.
3. A young woman wanting to discuss an article about a new oral medication with her doctor. (You might want to provide a sample newsletter, magazine, or newspaper article as a prop.)

**Prevent Diabetes Problems: Keep Diabetes Under Control,**  
[www.niddk.nih.gov/health/diabetes/pubs/complications/pdf/control.pdf](http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/diabetes/pubs/complications/pdf/control.pdf)