

How to Advocate for Yourself in Medical Settings

Taking an active role in your healthcare journey requires developing self-advocacy skills. While speaking up may be challenging, particularly when engaging with medical experts, it's essential to recognize that you have the expertise in your own experiences, symptoms, body, and medical history. Remembering this empowers you to assertively communicate and collaborate with your doctor for the most effective care.

Use these strategies to advocate for yourself and your health.



Arrive Prepared.

Bring your questions list, a daily pain tracker, and a notebook. The pain tracker will assist you in recalling your pain experiences over time, while the notebook is a convenient tool to keep all your health information organized in one place.



Describing and Documenting Your Pain for Care, a resource provided by The Pain Equity Project, contains the aforementioned tools.

Say something when you have concerns.

You and your doctor should be working towards the same goal. If you feel concerned about something that was said or a treatment that was prescribed, bring it up. Your doctor may be able to give you information that eases your anxiety and clears up confusion or they may be able to propose a different treatment option.



Document what occurs during the doctor's appointment.

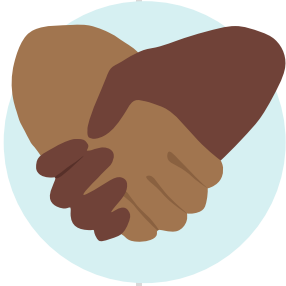
Carry a notebook or phone and take notes during your visit, including the doctor's explanations of potential treatment options, prescribed medications, and next steps. If you interact with multiple healthcare professionals, noting their names can be helpful.

If your doctor declines your request for a specific medication or test, kindly ask them to document the refusal and your symptoms in your medical chart.



Confirm next steps with your doctor.

At the end of your appointment, take a moment to summarize the information you have learned and ensure a clear understanding of the planned course of action. This practice promotes alignment and clarity between you and your doctor while allowing you to address any remaining questions or concerns that need further attention.



Bring a friend or family member.

Someone close to you can assist you in understanding the information from the doctor and remembering instructions once you're back home. Even if you asked great questions and took notes, having someone there can serve as a second set of ears. They might also think of additional questions to ask the doctor or remember details about your symptoms or treatment that you might have forgotten.



Your loved one may want to check out **The Pain Equity Project** resource on supporting someone experiencing pain: **Caregiver's Guide to Supporting a Loved One Experiencing Pain**.

Get a second opinion or switch doctors.

If you've communicated your concerns clearly but still feel unheard or uncertain, a practical next step is to get a second opinion, especially on serious health issues. Not every provider and every patient are a good match. If you consistently feel rushed, like your doctor isn't listening, you can't ask questions, or you don't have time to get through your list of questions, you may want to find a new doctor.



+ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more support on your pain management journey, check out these other resources from **The Pain Equity Project**.

[Your Roadmap to Treating Your Pain](#)

[Describing and Documenting Your Pain for Care](#)

[Caregiver's Guide to Supporting a Loved One Experiencing Pain](#)

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Given the historical discrimination and mistreatment Black people face in medical settings, it is normal to feel concerned or anxious about doctor visits. Preparing questions in advance can be helpful to empower yourself and ensure you get the information and healthcare you need.

Relevant questions to ask the doctor include, but are not limited to:

Understand your doctor's experience

- Do you help a lot of patients dealing with pain?
- Do you specialize in specific types or causes of pain?

Care and Treatment

- What types of diagnostic tests will be ordered?
- What medications will help? What side effects do they have?
- Will any of my other prescription meds, over-the-counter meds, or supplements that I'm currently taking interact with the recommended treatment?
- If your doctor gives you any remedies to manage your pain, ask how you should take them. For example:
 - ◇ Do I take them every day or regularly, even if I feel pretty good?
 - ◇ Should I try to live with as much pain as I can and only take the bare minimum of medication, or should I try to take sufficient medication to relieve my pain completely?
 - ◇ Should I stop taking the medication if I feel fine? If I decide to go off my medications, can I just stop or do I need to gradually taper off?
- Are there treatment options besides medications?
- Will insurance cover treatment?

Holistic Options

- Are there self-care options that can supplement medications or physical therapy?
- Will lifestyle changes help?

Next Steps

- Will other health specialists be consulted?
- What are the next steps if the recommended treatment does not work?
- Can I have take-home materials that I can refer back to while I'm deciding on the treatment options presented today?
- What are the best things I can do to take care of my health knowing my condition?