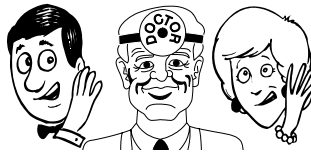


DIALOGUE WITH



YOUR DOCTOR

Nina Brown

The treatment of a chronic, progressive disease like Parkinson's disease is highly dependent on the interaction between the patient and the physician. The average office visit lasts less than 15 minutes. You have more time than your doctor to observe your reactions, so you must be an active participant in deciding which course of treatment to follow. It helps if both you and your neurologist have strong communication skills, but in the end, you need to take the responsibility for your own health care.

★ **Be Prepared.** If this is your first visit be sure to allow extra time to locate the office, park and fill out paper work. You also need your insurance card and either take or transfer your medical records.

State your most important concern first. Don't forget to mention if you have suffered an emotional stress, weight loss or gain, sleep or energy problems. Note when the problem began, whether it's a repeat occurrence and how you may have treated it in the past.

List all of your medications, the dosing schedule and any over the counter preparations, herbs and supplements because they can interact with prescribed medications, confuse laboratory test results or could even possibly cause symptoms. If you have any symptoms, write them down so you won't forget to mention them. Make copies of the medication diary found on the next page. Complete and take them to your next visit.

★ **Ask questions.** So that you know what questions to ask, you need to learn about your disease and the available medications. Make sure your questions are brief and concise and that you understand the answers. Ask the cause of the problem. Ask about safety and accuracy of tests, if they are needed.

★ **Discuss alternatives.** There may be other options to tests and treatment. Ask about new or experimental treatments. Discuss risks, complications, discomfort and costs. If you deal with multiple medical personnel, insist that they work as a team. If you're not satisfied, get another opinion.

★ **Back up your memory.** Write down your answers and instructions; take a tape recorder or a partner, relative or friend along with you. Don't allow the doctor to terminate the interview before you are sure you understand the diagnosis and recommended treatment. To assure this, reiterate what you heard in your own words.

★ **Be assertive.** Being more assertive with doctors can actually improve your health; so don't be embarrassed or afraid to ask questions. Studies identify two types of behavior in the doctor-patient relationship. The first type regards their physician as infallible. They are not inclined to challenge or question a test, diagnosis or treatment. They try not to complain or take up too much of their doctor's time. These patients tend to feel sicker and even die sooner than "pain-in-the-neck" patients. The second type of patient is intelligent, firm and informed. They view the physician as a specially trained equal, accepting the doctor's humanity as being subject to the same foibles, errors, pressures and self-interests as anyone else. A good physician tends to appreciate the second type of patient more.

Good communication doesn't end with your office visit. If a plan of action isn't helping, doesn't fit in with your lifestyle, or causes unexpected or unmanageable side effects, don't just abandon the plan on your own. If there are questions you forgot to ask or you think of new ones later, don't hesitate to call back. The consequences from lack of communication can be disastrous. Call your doctor and dialogue!