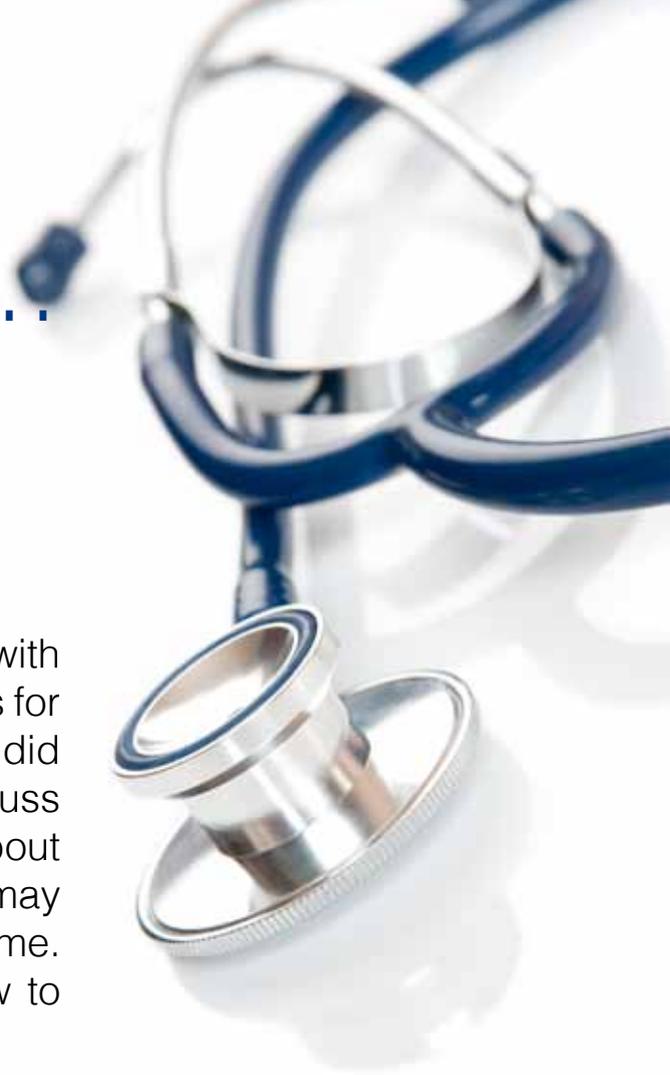


THE DOC IS READY TO SEE YOU... ARE YOU READY TO SEE THE DOC?



We often walk out of our consultation with healthcare professionals kicking ourselves for forgetting to ask certain questions. Or, we did not have enough time to explain or discuss in detail. Or, we could still be unclear about the healthcare professional's advice. You may feel that you had wasted very precious time. Henry Lew, psychologist, shows you how to make the best use of your consultations.

In general, consultation with most healthcare professional is between five and 30 minutes, depending on whether you are seeing a general practitioner, specialist, nurse, dietitian, etc. It is beyond your control that consultations are time limited but you can make full use of that short time by staying focussed on what you want to achieve in each session.

Stay Focussed

Most of us go to the consult expecting the “experts” to tell us what to do. That is fair enough. But before the experts can tell us “what to do”, they need to know what you want. Do you want to know more about your condition?

Or for the limited time, are you more interested to know what you could do? Or would you rather know more about what are the treatment options? There are many things you would like to find out, it may be helpful to prioritise and organise the information you need for each consultation.

Be prepared

Before the consultation, prepare what you would like to ask and frame it in a concise manner so that you can get it addressed and have more time to ask other questions.

Don't be afraid to ask

Being prepared for the consultation does not mean you have to prepare for an examination and find out everything about your condition. It will be a daunting and taxing task on you to try to understand the things that doctors spend years in medical school and training to learn. Although you can retrieve a lot of information online, doctors are generally helpful and more than willing to explain to you the medical jargon and terminology and how the information is related to your unique situation.

Express yourself

Express your concerns and do not discount your concerns. Do share what is on your mind even if you get interrupted by doctors. Doctors and healthcare professionals cannot read your mind. They are not with you every day. As far as they are the experts in healing or helping to manage your medical condition, you are the “expert” about how your body is responding or how your health is. Expressing your concerns will only help them to understand you and your situation better and offer even better treatment.

Bring along...

Do bring along your medical reports, medical test results, monitoring records of your glucose or blood pressure at home if you do so, medication lists, etc. If you are visiting a particular healthcare professional for the first time, this will help them understand your medical history more quickly. If you are going for your regular appointments, there is no harm in bringing them along as you may not actually be seen by your regular healthcare professionals in case of emergencies or rotation. Even though there may be records or documentation, nothing beats hearing it from you in person.

Be specific

Do not assume you know, even though you think you understand. Ask specifically what the instruction or advice is about.

Run through the advice or instructions in your head and see if you could visualise yourself doing it or carrying it out. This will help you generate the right questions on how to fit the advice into your lifestyle better.

For instance, if doctors say to “Come back when it does not get better”, ask what they mean exactly. How soon should you go back if it does not get better? And what does ‘not get well’ mean? What are the symptoms to look out for?

Set up your own “secretarial system”

Given the fact that in general most adults can remember only seven items on the average and our attention span can waver after about 20 minutes, it helps to take notes or ask for written instructions, handouts, etc.

Or, you could take someone along during the consult as some of the information may slip your mind or attention after time has lapsed.

Ask for the date range for follow up visits

Ask for the date range you should schedule your next follow up visit. In general, healthcare professionals do schedule the next consultation that they need to follow up with you. But due to some of your commitments you may find that you are unable to turn up for the next appointment as it draws nearer. Call up the clinic and speak to the staff, ask what the date range is to see your healthcare professional, if you are going to miss your next appointment. Most healthcare professionals would have informed you during the consultation, or leave special instructions with their staff to make an appointment to see you within a certain date.



Navigating through consultations with healthcare professionals can be very challenging, especially when you already need to make some drastic lifestyle changes to improve your health. But with the recommended strategies, we trust that your journey will be smoother from hereon.