



# TALKING TO TREATMENT PROVIDERS

TREATMENT DECISIONS ARE BEST MADE WHEN ALL PARTIES INVOLVED CAN COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND OPENLY WITH ONE ANOTHER; CAREGIVERS CAN HELP ENSURE OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION DURING APPOINTMENTS BY HELPING THEIR LOVED ONE PREPARE BEFOREHAND. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR INDIVIDUALS RECOVERING FROM A MENTAL ILLNESS TO HAVE A SAY IN THE CARE THEY ARE RECEIVING. BUT IT CAN BE HARD FOR YOUR LOVED ONE TO REMEMBER EVERYTHING THEY WANT TO SAY TO THEIR CARE PROVIDER DURING A VISIT; THAT IS WHY IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO PREPARE IN ADVANCE OF AN APPOINTMENT.

**PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE A HOST OF CHRONIC PHYSICAL CONDITIONS.<sup>2</sup>**

How much a person feels involved in their own treatment has been positively associated with satisfaction and empowerment during recovery.<sup>1</sup> By talking with your loved one beforehand and helping them come up with a list of symptoms, side effects, concerns and questions they may have, you can help ensure your loved one gets the most out of the valuable time spent with their care provider.

## TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OUT OF APPOINTMENTS

- > **Talk to your loved one.** Individuals vary in what is most helpful to them. Start by asking your loved one about whether they need or even want help. Your loved one may need you to take the lead in the doctor office or they may just want you in the room for moral support. Never assume you know what they want - always ask.
- > **Make lists.** Before the appointment, outline all the topics your loved one wants to discuss, to ensure you use your time wisely and nothing is left out. Start by making a list of any current side effects, symptoms or concerns your loved one may be experiencing. Encourage them to review any mood tracking materials or journals. If they are seeing a new provider, consider listing some specifics about their condition, like triggers. Any information you can provide that will help paint a clearer picture about your loved one and their condition is helpful. Getting your loved one to talk about these things may not be easy at first. Here are some example questions to help those conversations:
  - What symptoms are you currently experiencing? Which of these symptoms do you find to be the most challenging?
  - Overall, do you feel better, worse or about the same since the last appointment?
  - How well do you think your medications are working?
  - Do you have any challenges with your medication(s), like negative side effects?
  - Are there any concerns you would like to talk about?
  - Have you noticed anything different physically with your body?
- > **Address physical health.** Get an update on your loved one's physical health; make a list of any changes to treatment, new medications or ailments. See what physical side effects they might be experiencing. Doctors need to know about any medications your loved one may be taking for other conditions; it helps them avoid prescribing anything that could interact negatively. Update the provider about any changes.

> **Prepare questions.** Time moves quickly during appointments, so it may be helpful to prepare questions ahead of time to find out information, strengthen communication and ensure all concerns are addressed. Encourage your loved one to make their own list of questions. Here are some ideas:

- If starting or considering a new treatment option – ask what exactly the medicine is supposed to do, what side effects it may cause and for how long, how long it will take to work, what to do if you skip a dose, and how much it costs.
- If a treatment isn't working or the side effects outweigh the benefits your loved one is receiving, ask about other treatment options.
- Ask about the benefits and risks of different treatments.

> **Take notes.** Be sure and write down any important information you learn during the appointment, including answers to your questions or anything you and your loved one may want to learn more about. You can ask your provider about suggestions for additional reading, especially regarding new treatments. Don't be afraid to explicitly ask the provider why something is being prescribed, what the treatment is supposed to do, and which symptoms it will address - and remember to write it down. Before the next appointment, review your notes and check in with your loved one to see if their treatment plan is working.

> **Let your loved one do the talking.** One of your responsibilities as a caregiver is to help foster independence. Make sure you let your loved one do all the talking they are willing and able to do and use the list you have made to help them address their questions and concerns. You are there to support communication between the provider and your loved one. Step in only when needed and be attentive to what your loved one is saying verbally and nonverbally during the appointment.

> **Maintain communication.** Lots of time can pass between appointments. As your loved one moves forward with adjustments to their treatment, you may be able to notice changes that your loved one may not pick up on. Talk with them and share your thoughts. Throughout this process you can help your loved one by making note of information regarding their symptoms, side effects and concerns as they bring them up. When it is time for your next appointment, you can compile your notes and make a new list.

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Tambuyzer, E., & Audenhove, C. V. (2013). Is perceived patient involvement in mental health care associated with satisfaction and empowerment? *Health Expectations*, 18(4), 516–526. doi: 10.1111/hex.12052

<sup>2</sup>Patten, S. B. (1999). Long-Term Medical Conditions and Major Depression in the Canadian Population. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 44(2), 151–157. doi: 10.1177/070674379904400205

<sup>3</sup>Pinquart, M. & Sorensen, S. (2003) Differences between caregivers and noncaregivers in psychological health and physical health: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Aging*, 18(2), 250-267.

<sup>4</sup>Center on Aging Society. (2005). *How Do Family Caregivers Fare? A Closer Look at Their Experiences.* (Data Profile, Number 3). Washington, DC: Georgetown University.

## CARING FOR YOURSELF IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF BEING A CAREGIVER

Did you know that caregivers tend to experience higher levels of stress<sup>3</sup> and frustration<sup>4</sup> than those who are not caregivers?



Being a caregiver can be hard, so it's important to check in on your own mental health from time to time.

Visit [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) to take a free, anonymous, and confidential screen.