

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

The single most important way you can stay healthy is to be an active member of your own health care team. Virginia Premier Health Plan, Inc. wants you to stay healthy.

Before having an Operation, ask your Physician these Questions: What operation are you recommending?

- Why do I need the operation?
- Are there alternatives to the operation?
- What are the benefits of having the operation?
- What are the risks of having the operation?
- What will happen if I don't have this operation?
- Where can I get a second opinion?
- What has been your experience in doing the operation? How many have you performed without complications?
- Where will the operation be done?
- What kind of anesthesia will I need for the operation?
- How long will it take me to recover from the operation?

When Talking to your Doctor:

GIVE INFORMATION. DON'T WAIT TO BE ASKED!

- You know important things about your symptoms and your health history. Tell your doctor what you think he or she needs to know.
- It is important to tell your doctor personal information – even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- Bring a "health history" list with you, and keep it up to date. You might want to make a copy of the form for each member of your family.
- Always bring any medicines you are taking, or a list of those medicines (include when and how often you take them) and what strength. Talk about any allergies or reactions you have had to your medicines.
- Tell your doctor about any herbal products you use or alternative medicines or treatments you receive.
- Bring other medical information, such as x-ray films, test results, and medical records.

GET INFORMATION

- Ask questions. If you don't, your doctor may think you understand everything that was said.

- Write down your questions before your visit. List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.
- You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions. This person can also help you understand and/or remember the answers.
- Ask your doctor to draw pictures if that might help to explain something.
- Take notes.
- Some doctors do not mind if you bring a tape recorder to help you remember things. But always ask first.
- Let your doctor know if you need more time for questions. If there is not time that day, perhaps you can speak to a nurse or physician assistant on staff. Or, ask if you can call later to speak with someone.
- Ask if your doctor has washed his or her hands before starting to examine you. Research shows that hand washing can prevent the spread of infections. If you're uncomfortable asking your doctor this question directly, you might ask, "I've noticed that some doctors and nurses wash their hands or wear gloves before touching people. Why is that?"

TAKE INFORMATION HOME

- Ask for written instructions.
- Your doctor also may have brochures, audiotapes and videotapes that can help you. If not, ask how you can get such materials.

ONCE YOU LEAVE THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE, FOLLOW UP

- If you have questions, call.
- If your symptoms get worse, or if you have problems with your medicine, call.
- If you had tests and do not hear from your doctor, call for your test results.
- If your doctor said you need to have certain tests, make appointments at the lab or other offices to get them done.
- If your doctor said you should see a specialist, make an appointment.

When Getting Medical

- **Tests:**How is the test done?
- What kind of information will the test provide?
- Is this test the only way to find out that information?
- What are the benefits and risks of having this test?
- How accurate is the test?
- What do I need to do to prepare for the test? (What you do or don't do may affect the accuracy of the test results)



- Will the test be uncomfortable?
- How long will it take to get the results, and how will I get them?
- What's the next step after the test?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Check to see that the lab is accredited by a group such as the College of American Pathologists (telephone; 800-323-4040) or the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (telephone; 630-792-5800; Web site <http://www.jcaho.org>)

If you need a mammogram, make sure the facility is approved by the Food and Drug Administration. You can find out by checking the certificate in the facility. Or, call 1-800-4-CANCER 9:00am – 4:30pm EST to find out the names and locations of certified facilities near you.

WHAT ABOUT THE TEST RESULTS?

Do not assume that no news is good news. If you do not hear from your doctor, call to get your test results. If you and your doctor think the test results may not be right, have the test done again.

Here are Five Steps to Safer Healthcare: Ask questions if you have doubts or concerns.

- **Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers.** Choose a doctor you feel comfortable talking to. Take a relative or friend with you to help you ask questions and understand the answers.
- **Keep and bring a list of ALL the medicines you take.** Give your doctor and pharmacist a list of all the medicines that you take, including non-prescription medicines. Tell them about any drug allergies you have. Ask about side effects and what to avoid while taking the medicine. Read the label when you get your medicine, including all warnings.
Make sure your medicine is what the doctor ordered and know how to use it. Ask the pharmacist about your medicine if it looks different than you expected.
- **Get the results of any test or procedure.** Ask when and how you will get the results of tests or procedures. Don't assume the results are fine if you do not get them when expected, be it in person, by phone, or by mail. Call your doctor and ask for your results. Ask what the results mean for your care.
- **Talk to your doctor about which hospital is best for your health needs.** Ask your doctor about which hospital has the best care and results for your condition if

you have more than one hospital to choose from. Be sure you understand the instructions you get about follow-up care when you leave the hospital.

- **Make sure you understand what will happen if you need an operation.** Make sure you, your doctor and surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation. Ask your doctor "Who will manage my care when I am in the hospital?"

ASK YOUR SURGEON:

- Exactly what will you be doing?
- About how long will it take?
- What will happen after the operation?
- How can I expect to feel during recovery?

Tell the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and nurses about any allergies, bad reaction to anesthesia, and any medications you are taking.

When you are prescribed a new Medication, ask your Doctor or Pharmacist the Following Questions:

- What is the name of the medicine? What is it supposed to do?
- Is it okay to substitute a less-expensive generic medicine for the name brand? Will it achieve the same effect?
- What is the dose of the medicine? Are there food, drinks, other medicines, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- What are the possible side effects of the medicine? What should I do if they occur?
- How many refills of this prescription can I get?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What should I do if I accidentally take more than the recommended dose?
- Is there any written information I can take home with me? (Most pharmacies have information sheets that you can use as a reference.)

When you pick up your medicine at the pharmacy, check to be sure it is the medicine you were prescribed by your doctor. When your doctor prescribes a medication for you for the first time, make sure to tell him/her the following:

- The names of all medicines you are currently taking, including both over-the counter and prescription medication. It is important for your doctor to know this information in order to prescribe the medicine that will be the most helpful.
- Any concerns you have about using your medication.



- If you are allergic to any medication or have had troubling side effects from a medication that has been prescribed to you.

During your treatment, you should schedule a follow-up visit to your physician in order to monitor your progress. Make sure to tell him/her:

- About any problems you are having with your prescription.
- About any side effects or problems you have had since starting to take the prescription.
- About any new prescriptions that another doctor may have given you and any over-the-counter medicines that you started taking since your last doctor's visit.
- How you are feeling since starting the medication.